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OR, Tiger Dick to the Rescue.

A Sequel to "Three of a Kind"
and "Black-Hoss Ben."

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,
AUTHOR OF "ALWAYS ON HAND," "A HARD
CROWD," "THE GENTLEMAN FROM
PIKE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BITTER PARTING.

"GASPARD! Pedro! Manuel! Confound this
dog-kennel of a place! Ho, *anybody!* Are you
all dead in this house?"

Imagine a little man with a very round body
and a very red face, in a long flannel nightgown
and a conical night-cap of the same material.

Having made the corridor of the best *fonda*
in Santa Fe ring with his summons, in a trans-
port of rage he plucked off his cap and beat the
wall with it.

The head thus bared had not a sprig of hair to
relieve its smooth, white roundness.

"You lazy rascal!" was the salute with which

"AND NOW, BOYS, IT'S YELLOW JACK AG'IN' TIGER DICK TO THE DEATH; SO LET US GIT."

the irate guest greeted the lagging peon attendant.

"Excelenza, all the blessed saints are witness—"

"Where is my shaving water? If you infernal dead-alive scoundrels don't have it here in thirty seconds, I'll take two of you and bump your heads together!"

"Santissima Virgen! are not all at the command of Excelenza, that he should do for himself such menial service?"

"Let one of you shave me?—and be rasped from chin to temples! Off with you, I say!"

"Excelenza commands—"

"Confound you! will you never be off?" and springing after the bowing peon, he chased him the length of the corridor, beating him with his night-cap.

Pedro's nimble heels soon took him beyond the reach of this harmless bastinado.

"Por dios!" he muttered, "these accursed Americanos are possessed of Satan, every one!"

Meanwhile, puffing and blowing like a grampus, and anathematizing everything west of the Mississippi, Joel Brinton made his way back to his room, and sat down on the edge of the bed to regain his breath and composure.

While mopping the perspiration from his face and neck, Pedro returned with a tin cup of hot water.

The old gentleman made him stand where he could swear at him at short range during the making of his toilet.

Completely dressed, with the rather priggish neatness of an old bachelor, and wearing a wig in marked contrast with his grizzled mustache, Joel Brinton was a man who would at once be set down as a person of importance.

The fold under his double chin, the swell of his "corporation," his watch-fob with its dangling seal and charms, were imposing.

Mine host of the San Antonio addressed him with oily obsequiousness.

"If it please Excelenza, the stage will start in half an hour."

But his guest, who had just swallowed a breakfast which he openly denounced as execrable, now growled ungraciously enough:

"That means about dinner-time, I suppose! Wonder if there is anything to see in this god-forsaken hole?"

And with that Yankee "push" which had "done" Europe at railroad speed, he was about to fill in the few minutes at his disposal with a reconnoissance of the place.

But as he swung his cane preparatory to striking out at the amble which his short legs necessitated, he stopped dead still and stared.

"Why, bless my soul and body!" he panted, fumbling hurriedly for his eye-glasses.

He set them on the bridge of his nose, and stared again.

"Impossible!" he cried. "And yet it is none other than the dear girl herself, I declare!"

What he saw was a couple of riders coming down the deserted street.

The lady was mounted on a little buckskin mare of exquisite proportions. Her escort bestrode a stallion of larger frame, yet equally lithe, with a hide as black and glossy as a raven's wing, with blood-red nostrils and flashing eyes, every graceful movement betraying his fiery spirit.

Even in the astonishment of this unexpected meeting with the object of his journey to the far West, Joel Brinton noticed that the lady rode with her eyes on the ground, and that her face was pale and drawn with pain; while her companion, whose magnificent horse knew the restraint of neither saddle nor bridle, sat sternly erect, his white lips tight-locked, his eyes clouded beneath knit brows.

"Beatrice, my dear child!" cried Mr. Brinton.

The lady started and stared at him, her lips falling apart.

Her escort fastened his hot eyes upon the speaker; and Joel Brinton felt a thrill as if he had received a sword-thrust!

"Oh, uncle Joe!" cried the lady.

Then she turned a quick—was it frightened?—glance upon her companion, but said nothing to him.

He looked at her, and her eyes fell before his.

"What does all this mean?" was Joel Brinton's mental interrogatory.

He stepped out into the street to assist the lady to alight, with no very kindly feeling toward the stranger whose relations with her were so mysterious, but with a quick, dexterous movement which showed his perfect command over the animal, her escort caused his horse to stop, and, as the mare passed him, to pirouette, and then bound forward on the other side, so as to intercept the old gentleman, and cause him with good reason to leap back out of danger.

"Confound you, sir!" cried the offended pedestrian, his tightly-gripped cane beginning to shake nervously, as if it itched to be applied to the back of the arrogant horseman. "Do you mean to ride me down?"

It was plain that the young fellow did not intend to be robbed of his privilege of attendance upon the lady even at that cost, though he said with grave outward courtesy:

"I beg your pardon, sir!"

He had already slipped to the ground. He now turned and offered his hand to the lady.

Joel Brinton saw that, as she accepted it, she turned deadly pale and avoided the gaze of its owner; yet he felt that it was not with resentment at the almost rudeness which had been offered him. Some masterful emotion seemed to fill her soul to the exclusion of so ordinary a consideration as mere politeness.

In her agitation she did not wholly disengage her foot from the stirrup, and so was tripped, and fairly fell into the arms of her escort.

With a startled ejaculation she caught at him, one arm going round his neck, and her cheek striking his.

A wave of crimson swept to the roots of his hair. His eyes flashed fire. There could be no question of the fact that he strained her to his breast in an embrace of intense passion; and for one mad moment it seem as if his locked lips would burst into a lava-tide of speech.

But as she hung in his arms, she flashed into his eye a look of terror. That too was unmistakable.

He shuddered. His arms fell from about her. He turned away with bowed head, drawing a long, tremulous inhalation through his quivering nostrils.

She stood where he left her, her head hanging upon her breast.

Joel Brinton, too much amazed to take further part in this strange proceeding, only stared at these silent actors in a tragedy to which he as yet held no clew.

While the young man busied himself removing the trappings of the little buckskin mare, which he afterward tossed to waiting peons, Mr. Brinton had time to examine him.

He was of magnificent physique, with small hands and feet bespeaking refinement of lineage—a young Apollo whose physical beauty might appeal to any woman's heart, though arrayed in the rough garb of the West—a woolen shirt, and trowsers supported by a belt carrying holstered revolvers and bowie, his fine face being shaded by a gracefully slouched hat.

As he stood with his back toward the lady, the black stallion from which he had dismounted advanced daintily and nibbled at her shoulder.

With a throe of passionate emotion she took the beautiful equine head in her arms and pressed her lips to it, no sound warning the beast's master of this pantomime.

When he turned, she stood as he had seen her last, with her arms hanging at her sides, her eyes on the ground.

Without a word he swung himself to the back of his horse, and wheeling him, dashed back the way they had come.

The girl did not look after him, though she cast a quick glance at the buckskin mare she had ridden, as it followed him unbidden.

When the sound of hoofs had died out, the girl turned and extended her hand to the wondering little old gentleman, lifting her sad eyes to his face with a weary, deprecatory pleading.

He took it in silence. It was like ice! Silent he led her into the house.

They had scarcely crossed the threshold, when she swayed and sagged heavily against him.

Without a word, she had fainted dead away!

Alas! Joel Brinton was so little a hero, that he could not have carried her in his arms to save his life! Merely to sustain her weight, in addition to his own, made him pant, as he gasped:

"Help! help, here! Confound you! don't you see that the lady has fainted?"

Mine host, who had watched with mouth agape the drama just described, sprung to his assistance; but, to have "that greasy rascal" touch her seemed to Joel Brinton a sacrilege; so he drove him back with little ceremony, demanding that women be called.

They put her to bed; and when they had restored her to consciousness, she asked for him, and he went in to her.

"My poor child," he said, with a gentleness strangely at variance with his irascibility with others, "wait until you are feeling stronger."

"Oh, uncle Joe!" she responded, clinging to him, "you are so good to me! But I can tell you everything in a word. My poor dear papa is dead—dead!"

"Dead?—Jack dead?" he cried, greatly shocked.

"Dear old Jack!"

Then bending over the orphan yearningly, he went on:

"My poor child! I loved your father as if we were indeed brothers. And I could have saved him, if only I had not been on the other side of the world. I was in Egypt when I saw his name in the list of failures, reported in the London *Times*. I set out at once for home; and when I reached New York, and found that he had gone West, I followed on out here, to put every penny I have in the world at his disposal, and set him on his feet again with the best of them."

To all of which she listened in a silent, speechless way which showed the power over her either of her great affliction, or of some other feeling which Joel of course associated with the man who had delivered her into his keeping.

She seemed so stricken and nervous that, with kindly tact, Joel did not urge her to any further revelation then, but soon left her to sleep and

rest, hoping that on the morrow he would have from her lips the story of all her trouble.

If he had followed the man who had just left her with such evidence of passionate pain, he would have seen him ride far away through the mountains and across the plains, never once looking back.

At dawn on the following day this rider of the black horse stood on a spot where a few weeks before he had been thrilled with a wild delight—stood now in deepest despair, stroking the buckskin mare with a lingering touch.

He passed his hand over every point of excellence in her beautiful body, and thought of the anticipations that had started at sight of her grazing among her kind, then knowing man only as an enemy to be feared.

Since then he had taught her to love him, until she would follow him with the readiness of a dog. She had borne the weight of no human being save him, in training her, and, afterward, of the woman he had loved and lost; and now he was going to restore her to her wild liberty again.

Just when the sunbeams shot level across the prairie, a troop of wild mustangs came to the drinking-place near which he stood.

The wind was blowing strong from them to him, so that they had no warning by scent of his vicinity; and they had come close up to him, when he dashed out from the cover into their very midst.

Then how they scampered over the wide prairie!

He saw the little mare's eyes blaze, as she tasted once more the mad freedom of her old wild life. She spurned the ground with her flying hoofs. She tossed her head and snorted disdainfully. Her allegiance passed from him back to her old fellows. Untrammeled now by any device of man, she was in the van of that mad race, as by native right.

Saddened by this easy accomplishment of his object, the man drew out of the cut and let them pass on.

Then he threw himself face-downward on the ground, and his faithful black stallion grazed near, untethered.

All through the long day he never moved, any more than if he had been asleep or dead.

The shadows of falling night gathered about him lying thus; but when the morning sun rose again he was gone.

CHAPTER II.

BIRDS OF PREY.

A FORTNIGHT had passed since Beatrice Holyoke's extraordinary parting with the man, her love for whom was so apparent.

Joel Brinton had received so much of the tragic history of her few weeks' sojourn in the West as she chose to tell him, learning and asking nothing of that heart drama, one scene of which had been acted before him.

Broken in fortune and in health, her father had gone West to seek a temporary shelter with a half-brother whom he had not seen for years, but, instead of recuperating his energies for a renewed grapple with the world, he had found a grave in an alien land.

Of that half-brother Beatrice spoke with reserve. He had been killed by the hand of treachery under her horrified gaze.

She further hinted at a peril which would make it necessary to take an armed force to recover the body of her father for transportation to the East, begging Mr. Brinton not to make particular inquiry into its nature.

"It is a poor return for your kindness," she sobbed. "But, if you knew—"

"Say no more," interposed the old gentleman, with a tenderness that marked the great generosity hid beneath the rather crabbed exterior he presented to the world in general. "It is enough for me to be able to take Jack and Jack's child out of this howling wilderness. Once away, I shall strive to make you forget it all."

So he enlisted a score of sturdy fellows who were "keen for anything," and under Beatrice's direction they rode out to a solitary ranch on a fertile plateau surrounded by mountain peaks.

Here everything was in confusion, the place being in possession of a lot of peon dependents, no one of whom was equal to the task of reducing the others to order.

The men had taken advantage of the removal of restraints to abandon themselves to an unbridled drunken revel. Gambling, wrangling, fighting, and break-neck horse-racing occupied those who were not yet entirely besotted.

The women were like a flock of frightened sheep, and did little else than huddle together and count their beads, while they increased their fears by relating stories of death and ghostly visitation.

Within the house, an object of superstitious dread to them all, lay a faded and careworn woman, stark and still. That morning she had been found dead, lying prone across a new-made grave, in a chaparral near by.

"She was his wife," explained Beatrice, clinging tremulously to the arm of her old friend.

"Never was such devotion so brutally requited."

She is freed from her sufferings. It is a mercy to her! It seems like sacrilege that in death she should lie near the man who has trampled upon every claim of her womanhood; but if she could speak, I know that she would ask it. Let her be buried in the same grave with him."

It was done.

Then the body of her own dear father was disinterred and sent on its way to the East; and the sorrowing girl gladly turned her back upon a spot which she could never afterward remember without a shudder.

But with every mile eastward her spirits became more and more depressed, until before they again reached Santa Fe she abruptly threw herself into her guardian's arms, trembling and sobbing in some sort of hysterical paroxysm.

"Oh, uncle Joe!" she murmured, "if anything happens to me—anything dreadful—try to get word to a—a—Mr. Hamilton. He will perhaps be most generally known as Black-Hoss Ben. Don't fail. Nobody can help you as he can. He knows all about these terrible men, and can accomplish anything he undertakes against them."

"Nothing can happen to you, my dear," said the old gentleman, reassuringly.

He spoke very tenderly to her, but to himself he muttered with a discontented frown:

"I'd bet a pretty penny that she more than half-wishes that something would happen to her, as an excuse to appeal to that young vagabond! Black-Hoss Ben! H'm! a pretty fellow to introduce on the Avenue! Mrs. Black-Hoss Ben receives on Thursdays! By Jupiter! women are all alike! I thank my lucky stars I never got into their clutches! I ought to have worn a woolen shirt and top boots, to make myself attractive to 'em! Black-Hoss Ben! Confound him!"

All of which went to show that this grouty old bachelor was jealous of the dashing young cowboy who needed nothing to recommend him but his vigorous manhood.

At Santa Fe Beatrice took to her bed.

Her guardian summoned a doctor, and viewed with contemptuous suspicion the little Spaniard, with his finger and thumb yellow with unintermittent rolling of cigarettes.

"A blood-letting little fiend!" he muttered.

But the leech declared Beatrice's malady nervous prostration, and prescribed complete rest of mind and body.

"H'm! the little reptile is better than he looks!" was Joel Brinton's grudging commendation. "But how can the poor child get mental rest, haunted on the one hand by this Black-Hoss Ben, and on the other by the memory of the hell from which she has just escaped? What can have happened there; and what is the danger she yet fears?"

With these questions unsolved he took up his abode in the dull little Spanish town, and patiently submitted to be bored to death while he waited for the girl to recover strength.

He surrounded her with every comfort that money could buy, and watched over her with a solicitude that no father could have surpassed.

When not in attendance upon her, he extracted a querulous diversion out of riding about the country in the near vicinity.

For Beatrice's entertainment he drew upon his imagination, so as to convey the impression that he found it the most delightfully adventurous country he had ever sojourned in.

Then came a long blank day, when she waited his coming until wonder lapsed into uneasiness.

She sent the maid in attendance upon her to make inquiry, and was presently informed that the *señor* had left the *fonda* that morning as usual, and had not returned.

So the night closed in. Then she was seized with sudden alarm.

Rousing herself, she rose from her bed and caused herself to be dressed.

She had summoned the landlord of the inn, and was about to institute a search for her missing guardian, when it was announced that an *Americano* waited to see her.

"Show him in here at once," she directed, with a premonition that his appearance must have some connection with her old friend's absence.

He entered, a young fellow in the ordinary dress of a cowboy.

"I'm Pete Lane, ma'am, at yer service," was his introduction of himself. "You may have spotted me in the crowd that the gov'nor, yer uncle, took out to Demon Duke's ranch. I had the honor to pick up yer whip fur ye, ma'am, when you—"

"Yes, I remember you," said the girl, interrupting him breathlessly. "What do you wish with me now?"

"Waal, ma'am, I was hangin' about, bein's as I'm out of a job jest now; an' seein' a crowd before a shebang at the t'other end o' the burg, I 'lowed to drop over an' see what was the row."

"Yes! yes! What was it?" panted the girl, with clasped hands, too eager to wait his deliberate speech.

"Waal, ma'am, they had jest brung in a gent as was some hurt. They 'lowed to set him down at the fu'st house they come to, ye understand, as how he wa'n't gittin' no good out o' bein' tooted no furder than they could help."

"Mr. Brinton!" cried Beatrice. "Oh, what has happened to him?"

She wrung her hands in wild distress. She pictured to herself that dear old friend ghastly pale, with his life ebbing through murderous wounds.

"And it was for me!" she cried. "His life would not have been imperiled but that he was my defender! Oh, uncle Joe! uncle Joe! I would not have brought this upon you for the world! Where is he? Take me to him at once!"

"Ma'am, ef you'll hark to me, you'll allow as you can't do no manner o' good over thar. The gov'nor wouldn't know ye, ma'am; an' they're makin' him as comfortable as possible under the sarcumstances. I come to tell ye, knowin' as he was your belongin's, an' ye'd be like to be anxious."

"Stop!" cried the excited girl. "I demand to be taken to him at once! How far is it? Can I walk?"

"Ma'am, it ain't only a step, an' that's a fact. But ef so be you'll wait—"

"I will be back in a moment!"

And she fairly ran to her room for a bonnet and shawl to protect her from the night air.

A covert smile flitted across the face of the self-styled Pete Lane, and he thrust his tongue into his cheek, muttering:

"Talk about gulls! That thar infernal Greaser knows how to come it over women critters, he does! But it's a dog-goned shame—that's what it is, and the dirtiest business I was ever in sence they jugged me fur knockin' Sue in the head. But I was fryin' my own fish then."

Beatrice was back almost in a breath.

"You won't stay, ma'am?" was Pete Lane's last protest.

"No! Lead the way without another moment's delay!"

They went out upon the unlighted street. Here and there a bar of light was thrown across it from some door or window.

Beatrice now for the first time began to realize what she had undertaken.

But she reflected that this honest fellow had been in her guardian's employ, and was doubtless trustworthy.

"How far is it?" she asked, shrinking apprehensively closer to his side, as she peered through the gloom.

"It ain't three minutes' tramp, ma'am," was the assurance. "Ye see thar's the end o' the street, an' the house what the gov'nor's layin' in is jest round the corner. I wish't you wouldn't go in to see him tell I look ef he's all right."

This hint increased Beatrice's anxiety, and so diverted her attention from her surroundings.

"Oh! is he so dreadfully hurt?" she asked, plaintively. "Tell me!"—with a sudden terrible fear, "he is not—not—dead?"

She stood stock-still, and stared at her guide with clasped hands.

"Oh, no, ma'am!" he hastened to assure her. "He ain't nigh so bad as that. I—"

"Then let us hurry on!"

And she almost outstripped him in her eager advance.

"Look out, ma'am!" he called, warningly. "Ye might run your foot ag'in' somethin', an' throw ye."

And as if to save her from the danger, he took hold of her arm.

At that moment she heard the clatter of a squad of horsemen coming down the street.

They were almost directly upon her before she heard them, and she supposed that was because her attention had been absorbed.

She turned to look at them, and get out of their way if necessary.

As she did so, the end of her shawl was thrown over her head, an arm went round her neck, a firm hand was pressed close over her mouth, and she found herself struggling in the grasp of a man to whose strength her weakness was as nothing.

The riders drew up directly opposite where she stood, and she felt herself lifted and borne into their midst.

A voice, which was muffled by the folds of the shawl they had flung about her head, asked:

"Have you got her, Johnny?"

"You bet I have!" replied another close to her ear; and she felt the vibration in the lungs of the man to whose breast she was clutched.

"Hand her up hyer, then," said the first speaker. "She's game, ain't she?"

"You'll find her so, ef she don't come the woman business, an' faint before you git hold of her."

"Hang to her, pard! Don't let her scream."

"Ef she does while I've got my hooks onto her, she'll beat ary woman I ever see!"

All this while the captive had been struggling with a mad desperation inspired by the thought of the fate worse than death that awaited her if she did not succeed in eluding abduction.

Well she knew into whose power she had fallen!

But her captor was deliberately seeking to smother her into insensibility.

Her mad struggles hastened this effect. A fiery furnace glowed in her breast; her eyes seemed to start from their sockets; then came a fading out of all consciousness; and she hung

with relaxed muscles in the arms of her treacherous guide.

"Boss," panted Pete, when the struggle was over, "fur a sack o' tearin' catamounts, recommend me to this'n!"

"Pass her up; an' we'll talk about that afterwards."

"You're welcome to her. I've had my fill!"

And the unconscious girl was lifted up before a man who, as he received her into his arms, chuckled:

"Ha! ha! my beauty! you thought you could put Yellow Jack off with a 'No, thank you!' Well, you ain't the first that has been a little out in that calculation. And that fool of a Tiger Dick! He'll wish that he had clawed me when he had the chance! He'll find that I won't return the compliment, and let you slip through my fingers as easily as he let me slip through his! And now, boys, it's Yellow Jack ag'in' Tiger Dick to the death; so let us git!"

And away they sped into the darkness, like birds of evil omen!

CHAPTER III.

AT THE STAKE.

"WAS there ever such a land of vagabond rascals? The most utterly worthless—Get out of this, you—you—"

But old Joel Brinton choked with wrath.

"Ah! saints defend us!" gasped his unhappy peon servitor throwing up his hands in despair.

"Saints!" roared the crotchety old fellow. "I thank heaven I'm not one of your saints! You'd have me in bedlam in less than a twelve-month! I'll be hanged if I'm going to wear my soul-case out with you any longer! Come! I want to see if your heels are as heavy running away from work as they are dragging after it."

And with a face which looked as if he was thirsting for "Greaser" blood, he threw forward the muzzle of his carbine, and brought the stock to his shoulder.

"Holy Mother, defend me from this devil of an *Americano*!" shrieked poor Concho.

And reining the burro sharp round, he plied heels and hands and voice, to urge the little beast to his best paces.

Away he scampered over the prairie, glancing over his shoulder in momentary apprehension for his life.

"The paltry coward!" growled Joel Brinton. "If I felt sure enough of my aim to tap his hide, and let a little of his craven blood out without seriously harming him, I believe I'd give him something to howl for."

Meanwhile the culprit was rapidly disappearing in the direction of Santa Fe, and his exasperated employer awoke to the fact that this deserter would leave him without a guide in a country where all landmarks looked alike to his unfamiliar eyes.

"But, by Jove! I'm not dependent on the care of such a knave as that!" he cried. "If I don't know something about this country in a week's time, that's proof that I ought to cut loose and learn something on my own hook."

And he resolutely turned his face toward the west, and rode on.

"I've the sun," he went on; "and if I'm so mole-eyed as to lose my bearings with that, the sooner I find out that I'm in my dotage, the better."

A few minutes later he passed the point of a little clump of timber.

"Good heavens!" he cried, pulling up his horse abruptly.

Then, in a tremor of excitement, he threw up his carbine and fired.

The next instant he spurred his horse forward in mad eagerness.

The graceful form of a buck, with its pronged horns laid well back, and its hoofs beating a dull tattoo on the prairie loam, while it skimmed the ground like a bird on the wing, showed the cause of this excitement.

From that moment Joel Brinton never thought of anything but the coveted prize; until he was at last forced reluctantly to admit that it had hopelessly eluded him.

But, meanwhile, how many miles of that rolling earth-ocean had been passed over, and in what direction?

Even as he gazed about him for some answer to these important questions, his attention was attracted by a shrill sound that sent a thrill of altogether novel sensation through him.

He had never heard its like before; but he seemed instinctively to know what it was.

A quick glance confirmed his worst apprehensions.

"Indians!" he cried, in dismay. "By Jove! this may turn out a mighty awkward adventure!"

He wheeled his horse for instant flight, but even as he did so he glanced up at the sun.

There, too, fortune was against him!

"This is going further away from home! But I can't be nice about that, with such gentlemen as those in my rear."

And he spurred westward.

Now began a chase on the issue of which hung liberty, if not life itself.

It was useless to anathematize his recreant

guide, who might know what to do in this emergency, if he were only at hand. The one thing was to distance his enemies, and then make a *detour* to the eastward.

But, alas! it proved that they were better mounted than he. He saw that they gained upon him; and then rose his high courage.

"There are too many of the vagabonds to hope to fight them successfully single-handed," he reflected. "I'll reserve my fire until the last, and then, if they take me without one of them swallowing an after-dinner pill that won't aid his digestion, they're welcome! But what will Beatrice think? She will never know what has become of me. Poor child! what will she do? She will be entirely alone in this infamous country!"

But the savages—a score of them, at least—were yelling at his heels. Already the sharp crack of their rifles was followed by the spiteful zip of bullets close to his ears.

"Now for it!" he said to himself.

And bracing his nerves, and sending a last regretful thought to the girl to whom he knew his death would be a blow second only to that of her father, he reined in his horse and turned at bay.

Instantly his pursuers, with yells of triumph, scattered in opposite directions, and began to circle about him.

He was completely hemmed in, and now it appeared that they resolved to take him alive.

"For torture, I suppose!" he reflected, recalling the blood-curdling accounts of Indian cruelty, which were not so vividly realistic when read at a distance of two thousand miles.

They ceased firing at him, and only sought to terrify him by yelling and brandishing their weapons, as they rode in narrowing circles.

"This can't last," he said. "They are closing in on me. If I could only manage to get two in a line as they pass each other."

His terrified horse kept tossing its head and moving restlessly, so that he knew there was hope in nothing but a snap shot.

He watched his chance, and suddenly brought his rifle to his shoulder.

But the instant before he drew trigger, he heard a report behind him, and his horse bounded forward and fell, throwing him over its head.

The shock partially stunned him, but he heard the shrill chorus of yells with which his foes greeted his downfall.

He scrambled to his feet disarmed, and with his hat mashed over his eyes.

He cast it aside, and in the panic which sprung from the feeling of utter helplessness while his enemies closed in upon him on all sides with blood-curdling yells, made a blind dash for liberty.

He heard the thud of hoofs beside him; his ears rung with a yell of barbarous triumph; he saw a painted savage lean toward him; he caught the flash of a murderous knife; a hand clutched his hair; and, as he instinctively shrank away, he—left his wig in the possession of the enemy!

A cry of astonishment arose from his captors as they reined in their animals so as to inclose him in their midst.

They stared at him, as he stood there with his head shining in the sun like a billiard-ball.

Then they burst into a general shout of laughter.

However, the captor of this novel trophy swung it round and round his head, sending up a yell of delight, as he clapped his hand upon his mouth.

Then he fell to examining it, turning it inside out, and scrutinizing the surface which would ordinarily be expected to be reeking with blood.

He stared from the wig to the unmarred scalp of its late wearer, chattering to his companions like a magpie in unintelligible jargon.

Some one from behind rubbed his hand over the prisoner's smooth poll, and even patted it—an indignity which poor Joel Brinton was in no position adequately to resent.

However, he did not propose to stand there for their amusement without verbal protest, at least.

"You infernal leather-faced heathens!" he shouted, "didn't you ever see a wig before?"

The possessor of the wig looked at him and showed his teeth in a grin of wondering glee, replying only with a shrug of his shoulders and a non-committal:

"Ugh!"

"I'll thank you to pass that back, if you have no further use for it," said stout Joel Brinton, extending his hand for his property.

But the savage shook his head, muttering:

"No good! Ugh!"

And he coolly proceeded to fasten his trophy in his belt.

One of his companions grunted:

"Medicine!"

Joel Brinton had read enough of Indians to know that this was a hint that so strange a scalp which could be lifted off and replaced at will, without inconvenience to the wearer, might be an unlucky thing to retain possession of.

But the happy savage only patted his prize, muttering:

"Big chief!"

"You confounded wooden-head!" shouted Joel Brinton, losing patience at this misconception of the barbarian, "am I to be exposed to a cold in the head because you fancy my wig?"

The savages roared with laughter, perhaps at the oddity of this petulance in the face of the cruel death that menaced him.

He was made to mount before one of them, and the whole party rode off.

He expected to be carried away to some Indian village, to be tormented by squaws and children, but his captors stopped at the first chaparral they came to, and there bound him to a tree and piled fagots about him.

So this was the death through which so many unfortunates had agonized! But it opened with a proceeding of which he had never read.

The savages began to dance about him, performing outlandish antics, in which the effort to terrorize was blended with a great deal of fun. They interspersed menace with their weapons with patting his head, and yells of fury with laughter. But the most unexpected thing about it was that they all seemed to have bottles of whisky, from which they drank themselves, while they fairly poured it down their prisoner's throat.

"If I am to be burned," reflected the old gentleman, "I might as well avail myself of this opportunity to render myself unconscious. There is no chance to escape, and this will at least spare me excruciating pain."

So he seconded their efforts, and was soon most royally drunk.

This seemed to afford them more and more amusement, for as intoxication approached all sense of his danger passed from the prisoner's mind, and he clamored for his wig.

In the midst of it all the liquor had its effect. His head sunk on his breast, and he snored in drunken stupor.

Let this much be said: his last rational thought was of the poor girl who was thus deprived of his protection.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE.

"ATCHEW! atchew! a—a—a—a—atchew! Bless my soul a'd body! where's that idferdal dight-cap? I believe the codfounded thi'g gets off just for devilbedt! Atchew! a—a—a—atchew! Dow I suppose I'll have a cold id by head for the dext six budths!"

While stupidly mumbleing his discontent, half aroused, Joel Brinton fumbled about for his wig, without opening his eyes.

But as he turned his head, it seemed as if a bolt were driven through his temples.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned, "how my head aches! Atchew! Heaveds a'd earth! this idferdal sdeezi'g will split it id two! Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!"

He struggled to a sitting posture, and rocked to and fro, with his head between his hands and his elbows on his knees.

But this change of level brought on a death-like nausea, and a retching so violent that it seemed as if he would "throw up his immortal soul," was added to the sneezing which already caused him so much agony.

However, the spasmodic emptying of his stomach finally shook him out of his stupor, so that he discovered that he was not in his bed, as he supposed, but on the ground, in the midst of a boundless prairie.

Wider and wider he strained his bloodshot eyes, trying to reunite the broken links of memory.

It was not until he had twisted clear round, so as to discover at his back a circle of fagots heaped about the foot of a tree, that he hit upon a cue which was like completing an electrical circuit.

Then at a flash he recalled it all—the savages, the stake, the liquor with which they had plied him!

What did it all mean? He was not harmed in even so much as a scratch. They must have unbound him after he had succumbed to the liquor, and left him lying there on the ground.

"It's by wig that saved be, as I'b a livi'g sidd'er!" he cried. "Those codfoudded superstitious fools codeluded that a bad whose hair would cub off so easily bust be 'bad bedicid,' as they call it! Well, a wig aid't a bad thi'g to have whed you go Iddiad-hudti'g, a'd that's a fact! A—a—atchew! Codfoud that skeptic that took the risk of tyi'g a bebicid scalp to his belt!—he's taked it away with hib! A'd how ab I goi'g to get adother id this heathed c'udtry, I'd like to 'dow? He's altogether too sbart for a savage!"

But a life for a wig is a pretty fair bargain, even in a country where wigs are at a premium.

His lips and throat were parched, and his head burning with a raging fever, while the rest of his body was cold and clammy.

His first necessity, then, was water. A thorough sousing of his head would clear his ideas, so that he could act more intelligently.

Securing a stick to serve as a staff, he staggered away in quest of the cooling element; but having found a running stream, he growled at the prospect of adding to his cold while allaying the fever in his head.

Then began the tedious tramp for Santa Fe,

even the general direction of which was but a guess.

The descending sun showed him that he had been unconscious full twenty-four hours, and that he now had a fair prospect of a second night without food or shelter.

But fortune favored him. Just before night-fall he came upon a small party of horsemen.

"Gracias a Dios!" cried one, riding forward and leaping to the ground, "we have found him alive! Ah, señor! the blessed saints have preserved you to us! Should I ever have been able to sleep in my bed again, if you had come to harm!"

"You idferdal scouddrel!" shouted old Joel Brinton, making a dive at the penitent, who eluded him with agility.

It was indeed Concho, who, dismayed at the continued absence of his employer after the disappearance of Beatrice, had gathered a few of his friends and come in search of him.

"But what has happened to Excelenza?" he cried. "The heavens and earth have—"

"I'll teach you what has happe'd to be!" shouted the enraged sufferer, rushing after the delinquent guide.

"My brothers! do not let him touch me!" cried Concho, making a good use of his legs the while. "A Díos! he is driven distracted! Calamities but multiply!"

"Head hib off there, you scouddrels!" commanded stout Joel Brinton, as the nimble peon dodged in and out among the plunging horses of his companions. "Let be get by hads od hib! I'll tear hib li'b frob li'b!"

But the others only fell to laughing, while they scattered in every direction, to avoid over-riding one another.

This kind of sport was short-lived, Joel Brinton soon being compelled to stop and gasp for breath, while he shook his fist at Concho in impotent wrath.

The peon sought to make his peace by tendering his horse for his employer's use, while he said, with a great show of emotion:

"Ah, Excelenza! your wrath against poor Concho will be swallowed up in grief when you learn the unspeakable misfortune that has befallen us all! God's mercy! how can I speak it?"

"What's that?" asked Mr. Brinton, impressed by the man's seriousness.

"It is the Donna Beatriz, alas!"

"Biss Holyoke? What has happe'd to her?"

"She is gone!"

"God? God' where? Atchew! Codfou'd this idferdal cold!"

"It is known only to the good God!"

"Look here, you cadti'g rascal! Drep your piety, a'd tell be what you bead, id two words."

Thus adjured, Concho narrated, with many appeals to the saints, what had happened in Joel Brinton's absence.

The desire to show his distinguished guest every attention had led the landlord of the *fonda* to go out to see him.

He thus learned that the story of the *Americano* was a deception; and from that moment Beatrice was nowhere to be found.

"It has come!" groaned Joel Brinton, inwardly—"the danger she feared! My God! how is it to be averted? If she had only made me her confidant! But now I do not know which way to turn. It is a case of abduction; but by whom? Whom can I turn to for a word?— Ah! there's that Black-Hoss Ben!—confound him! Must I appeal to him? But I know of no one else who knows anything about her life in this godforsaken country!"

Meanwhile he had called loudly for a horse, and mounting, had dashed in the direction of Santa Fe.

He must first learn in detail everything that had happened there.

He put the landlord and every one else who had seen the mysterious *Americano* through a rigid cross-questioning as to his personal appearance and what he had said.

"It is a plot all the way through!" was his conclusion. "My capture was only a pretense to get me out of the way! That accounts for my not being harmed. But the fellow must be a tender-hearted scoundrel, whoever he is. It would have cost him less trouble to finish me. Ah! I have it! He did not choose to begin his wooing in the character of my murderer! That must be it. A rival of this Black-Hoss Ben! That's the reason he can be relied on to fly to the rescue—confound him! But this fellow is in league with Indians! The beggarly crew! When I find him, I'll compel him to get that wig back!"

Thus beset, Joel Brinton, not a little against his will, yielded to the necessity of seeking Black-Hoss Ben.

Forty-eight hours later saw him entering a mining-camp, whither he had traced the object of his quest.

The camp was in a state of excitement over a tragic occurrence but two days old; and the moment Joel Brinton asked for Black-Hoss Ben, he saw that he thereby made himself an object of suspicion.

"What d'ye want o' Black-Hoss Ben?" asked a red-shirted miner, with a sullen frown.

"That's my affair, my man!" replied Joel

Brinton, with spirit, the stoppage in his head being relaxed, though his nose was yet puffed up and red. "With your kind permission, I'll re-serve the statement of my business for Black-Hoss Ben's own ear."

"That's all right," growled the fellow. "But, ye hyear me, stranger?—ef ye're a pal o' Black-Hoss Ben's, ye'll get nothing but hard knocks in this hyer camp."

"Meanwhile," said Joel Brinton, coolly, "if you will suspend judgment as to my relations with Black-Hoss Ben, and tell me where he is to be found—"

"I'd see you in—"

"That's far enough, if you please! I've seen men like you before."

The fellow looked at the "tenderfoot" who took him up so short.

He saw a gentleman with a cosmopolitan air, whom it was not easy to measure—a man who looked him fearlessly in the eye.

Joel Brinton always rose with the emergency. When need came, it found him "thar!"

In lieu of his wig, his head was tied in a hand-kerchief. The last two days of suspense had made him forgetful of self; and his usually neat dress was soiled with dust. There was no guessing what he might have recently passed through.

His presence in the camp was soon noised about; and the residents of the place gathered in and about the hotel, to stare at him in sullen suspicion.

"A bad lot of men to get down on one," he reflected. "But I'll be hanged if I will let them badger me into stating my business with Black-Hoss Ben. I wonder what the scoundrel has been up to here! He must be as hard a case as any of them. How can he have gained ascendancy over Beatrice? The girl must be mad!"

While he was eating his supper a note was thrust into his hand by a man who did not stop to be questioned.

"Eh! what's this?" he reflected. "Mystery! The plot thickens."

The note, written in a delicate feminine hand, read:

"If the senor will call upon the Golden Serpent he may hear something to his advantage."

"The Golden Serpent," he mused. "Who's that?"

Upon making inquiry he was informed:

"Boss, that thar's a woman what runs a gambling dive down the street."

"A plot, probably," reflected the recipient of the note. "I wonder if I can cope with these fellows, single-handed and blindfolded? But I must give them a chance to spring their trap to learn what it is. I'll go."

He went out into the street, found the place, and entered.

He was surprised at the elegant appointments of the place. While he was looking about he was touched on the arm.

"Boss, you're expected. Ef you'll foller me, you'll leave this hyar place a wiser man than when ye came in."

He turned to see as villainous-looking a man as he would care to meet anywhere.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"The Golden Serpent's man," was the brief reply.

"Well, what do you want?"

"It's the Serpent as wants ye, boss."

"Who is this Serpent?"

"That you'll find out when you see her."

"What does she want with me?"

"She'll tell ye herself, I reckon."

"Where am I to see her?"

"In yon."

"You may be leading me into a trap, my man."

"Ef you hain't got the sand to take that chance, you hain't no business to come into this hyar country, stranger."

"I have the sand, as you call it. Lead on."

"That's the way to talk it, boss."

And the fellow turned without further comment and led the way into a back room.

Joel Brinton followed, on the alert for any surprise.

They might murder him in there.

But then he began to feel that he had pitted himself against desperate enemies, who might murder him anywhere, if they saw fit.

Traversing a passage lighted only through the door which Joel Brinton left open behind him, his guide opened a door into a pitch-dark room.

"Hold on!" interposed Beatrice's guardian. "I'll wait until you strike a light in there, if you please."

"Boss," replied his guide, "you left the light behind when you come on this racket!"

"So it appears. But unless you are a nest of murderers in here, why do you have to enshroud yourselves in darkness?"

"You furgit, stranger, that this hyar ain't none o' my funeral."

"True! And that suggests that it may be mine before I get through with it."

"Thar's always one way out of it."

"What's that?"

"Crawfish!"

"I'm obliged to you for the suggestion. I think I'll not adopt it."

And boldly the old hero stepped across the darkened threshold into—

Before he had time to guess what, he was struggling desperately for dear life!

CHAPTER V. A LADY'S HAND.

"I'm a dead man!"

That was the first thought that flashed through Joel Brinton's mind.

The second proved his great generosity. It was—

"Poor Beatrice!"

Meanwhile he struggled with mad desperation, only to be borne helpless to the floor, and there securely bound.

Then he was lifted to his feet.

Thus far not a word had been uttered by his captors.

"By Jove!" he reflected. "Whoever it is that is running this thing, he seemed determined not to slaughter me. I am truly obliged to him for his consideration."

But his meditations were interrupted by the voice of one of his captors.

"All right!"

"This way," responded another voice at a few paces' distance.

The captive was led in that direction, and seated in a chair.

Then he heard his captors take perhaps half a dozen steps in the direction he was facing, and all was still again.

"This is a queer go!" he thought.

A door opened, and a flood of light streamed over him.

He saw that he was seated in the passageway through which he had been beguiled into this trap, directly opposite and facing the door of the dark room in which he had been seized.

The light came through a door at the end of the passage opposite that by which he had entered from the gambling saloon.

It therefore illuminated him, but left the room into which he was looking as dark as ever.

As the light streamed over him, he heard a voice exclaim:

"Madre Santissima!"

The first thing that struck him was that the voice was altogether different from those of the men with whom he had struggled.

It was the exquisitely modulated voice of a—no doubt—beautiful woman!

But the involuntary ejaculation expressed surprise, and, alas! amusement.

Joel Brinton well knew what had thrown the lady off her guard; and flushing as red as a peony, he said something very naughty to himself, though he observed outward silence.

The fact was that in the scuffle the handkerchief which he had bound about his head in lieu of his lost wig had come off, and he had the pleasant consciousness of presenting to the view of a lady whose face was invisible to him a head that irresistibly suggested a peeled onion!

"If I ever get my hands on the fellow who is at the bottom of this plot to make me ridiculous," he thought, "I'll mark him for life!"

"Senor," said the unseen lady, her voice now under control.

"Madam," responded Joel Brinton, as politely.

"You will pardon me this violence which has brought out your illustrious courage?"

"It would be impossible to refuse anything so subtle a flatterer!"

"Believe me, it was with no intention of offering you bodily harm."

"I could not think that harm could spring from one so fair, had I not past experience to that effect."

The lady laughed softly, a rippling, liquid music.

"By Jove! what voices these tropical women have! I'd give a little something to see her," reflected our old gallant.

"Still, I had an object," pursued the lady.

"No doubt," assented Joel Brinton.

"I wished to have you entirely in my power."

"I am so, spiritually as well as physically."

Again the lady laughed.

"You are as gallant in speech as you are gallant in action," she said.

"And I have faith to believe that your face is as sweet as your voice!" replied the old beau.

"I'll be hanged if this ain't a rum go!" he reflected, "to be exchanging pretty speeches with a woman—and a young one, I'd bet my wig, if I only had it!—with this head in full sight! How she must be laughing! But she sha'n't see that it disconcerts me, if I die for it!"

"You make me ashamed of having put bonds on one as courtly as he is brave," said the lady.

"Then I have no doubt that you will be moved to complete the charm of your gracious appreciation by an act of consideration to which I need not more definitely allude."

"You deserve it, truly! Will you oblige me by stepping into this room?"

Joel Brinton rose, and once more entered the darkened apartment.

The door was closed behind him by unseen hands; and a moment later his bonds were loosed, and he stood once more a free man.

Even his weapons were restored to him, being thrust into his belt by men whose vicin-

ity was otherwise indicated only by their low breathing.

He heard them walk away from him, open a door, pass through and close it behind them.

Then the lady spoke.

"We are alone, and can now converse without restraint," she said.

But at that instant Joel Brinton was struggling with a mighty, an irresistible impulse.

He could not answer her for the life of him!

It was of no use a draught had struck him in his most vulnerable point. For the time being, he was more susceptible in his head than even in his heart.

So the fatal explosion came.

"Ket-chew! a-ket-chew!"

"Confound this beastly thing!" he muttered, and then began to catch his breath again, completely at the mercy of the titillation in his nose.

"Madam," he said, when he could command his voice, "if you will pardon me, your attendants have neglected to restore to me the handkerchief upon which I am dependent to do service in the place of my wig, lost in an unfortunate adventure three days since."

"Pardon me!" said the lady. "It was an oversight—"

"Madam, I need no assurance of the fact."

"—which I hasten to repair."

Even as the melodious cadences of her voice seemed to linger like a caress in the air, Joel Brinton heard the rustle of feminine drapery.

Then came silence, followed by the rasp and crackle of an igniting match; and the room was suddenly illuminated.

Joel Brinton would have been more or less than man if his attention had not been chiefly fixed by an object nearest the point of illumination.

It was a hand—such a hand!—thrust between a pair of heavy Turkish curtains so as to reveal an arm half way to the elbow, holding a blazing match which drew the eye to its lovely sconce.

Never more exquisitely tapering fingers, with nails like shells; never more smoothly rounded arm, springing from a fluffy garniture of soft lace.

The native beauty of neither hand nor arm was marred by any artificial ornament.

There were the flowing curves, the polished surface, the warm blending of carnation and olive!

Joel Brinton stared at the dainty member, oblivious to everything else.

The flame burned steadily until it approached the delicate finger-tips.

Then there was a little cry of petulant exultation, and the match fell to the floor, and went out.

Joel Brinton had not yet recovered his wig!

"There!" said the dulcet voice, with a cadence of pretty impatience, "Senor has not improved his opportunity."

"On the contrary, madam, I did not lose an instant!" averred the beau.

"Madre de Dios! you are incorrigible!" cried the lady.

But it was plain that she was not displeased at his compliment.

Once more the imps of catarrh reminded Joel Brinton that at his time of life—or at any rate, until the recovery of his wig—he should not be up to such gallantries.

There was a moment of furious struggle and impotent rage; and his answer was an explosive:

"Ack-ket-chew!"

"You see!" said the lady, as if to urge that it was not her fault.

"If you will graciously accord me a second opportunity!" pleaded the unlucky gallant, with all humility.

"To be wasted as was the last?" asked the lady, mischievously.

"To be wasted compared with the last," was the complimentary amendment.

A second match enabled him to see that the apartment was furnished far beyond anything he would have expected in that wild country.

It was a parlor which yet had the air of a boudoir. Everywhere were odds and ends of feminine handiwork, those graceful little trifles which an old bachelor's money cannot buy, unless it is used to bribe some pretty friend about Christmas time.

Across one corner stood a luxurious divan, with an Oriental rug before it. Negligently against the foot of it leaned a Spanish guitar.

Joel Brinton found his handkerchief on the floor, but waited until the match went out a second time before adjusting it to his head, conscious that, with its knotted corners standing out like lynx ears, it added nothing to his comeliness.

Once more in the dark Joel Brinton heard the curtains parted and the lady re-enter the room, approaching him.

"If senor will permit me to lead him to a seat," said the mellifluous voice.

To see the lips from which it proceeded he would have been tempted to part with his handkerchief, and take the consequences!

In a moment he felt the touch of her soft, warm fingers.

Then he submitted to her guidance toward the divan.

He heard her foot strike against the lute, and guided by the sound he sat down so near the end as to leave her room only by sitting quite close to him.

But she was evidently too wary to fall into that cunning trap. She walked round him and took a seat on the other side, having more than half of the divan at her service.

"The little witch is up to a thing or two," he reflected.

"One would think these bald-headed old fellows were not twenty!" was the lady's secret thought.

But aloud she said, with the wanted caressing of her rich, low voice:

"Now, if senor will pardon my wretched trespass upon his liberty—"

"Why quarrel with the road to happiness, dear lady?"

"You must be curious to know the reason of this interview."

"Will you begin by telling me why you wished to get me so completely in your power, if only to release me again?—that is to say, so far as physical restraint is concerned?"

"Listen, then!"

CHAPTER VI.

A HEART OF FIRE.

"My object," pursued the Golden Serpent, "was, first, to prove to you that I had the power to thwart you in the pursuit which has brought you to this camp."

"Believe me," protested Joel Brinton, "that is but the least of your powers over me."

"Secondly, that I have not the disposition to do so."

"I trust that acquaintance will turn that negative good-will into positive favor."

"I was coming to that. I may prove a not wholly useless ally."

"Or, better yet, friend?"

"Friend, if you will have it so."

"I will—if it depends upon me. But tell me how I am to merit such kindness?"

"Will you have confidence in me, if—"

"Implicit!"

"Do not promise too hastily. I am about to pry into your business here."

"With reference to which I have nothing to conceal—from you!"

"You have made inquiry for a man called Black-Hoss Ben?"

"And got nothing but short answers, so far!"

"He has made himself particularly odious in this camp so recently, that the men are yet sore about it."

"I learned as much."

"Have you given any reason for seeking him?"

"No; it seems to have been taken for granted that I am a friend of his, and I have enough of the mule in my composition to decline to gratify the cavalier curiosity of these blustering fellows."

"But to one who approached you in a less aggressive way?"

"I might prove more communicative."

"To me, for instance?"

"To you before all others."

"Are you a friend of his, then?"

"No."

"An acquaintance?"

"Not even that. I never saw or heard of him until two weeks ago."

"And yet you have urgent business with him?"

"Yes."

"Not hostile to him?"

"Quite the reverse—I'm afraid!"

"Ah!"

The lady uttered that ejaculation as if, on the alert, she seized upon his implied want of hearty concurrence in what was favorable to Black-Hoss Ben.

It was followed by a silence which gave Joel Brinton time to reflect:

"By Jove! the jade is partial to that young jackanapes! Has he made conquest of every woman in this section of country, I wonder?"

The lady spoke again, in a lower, more guarded tone, as if feeling her way.

"I infer that it is not in your own interests that you are seeking him?"

"Indirectly, but chiefly in behalf of another."

"And that other?"

It was now Joel Brinton's turn to hesitate. Was he on the point of rousing the jealousy of this Spanish woman, and giving Beatrice a mortal enemy?

The Golden Serpent was quick to detect the pause, and hurriedly interposed:

"I see that I have reached the limits—"

"Of your faith in my sincerity when I said that I had nothing to conceal from you. The fact is, that I have narrowly escaped favoring you with another sneeze, out of which the prospect of losing your confidence has frightened me."

Joel Brinton told that "whopper" so glibly

that the Golden Serpent believed him, and laughed softly.

"Then my suspicions may not be correct, that that other is a lady?"

"On the contrary, they are quite correct; but a lady my interest in whom is of such a character that there could be no possible reason for my wishing to conceal it from you."

"A niece, perhaps?"

"The daughter of my old chum before I was out of jackets."

"Ah! That is most romantic! And her name?—if it is not an insufferable trespass?"

"Beatrice Hol—"

"Mother of God!"

The lady fairly leaped out of her seat, as she interrupted him before the name was fairly out of his mouth.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Joel Brinton, rising also.

But the lady strode away from him across the room, with such headlong precipitancy that she seemed to have forgotten the danger of collision in the darkness.

She had not taken half a dozen steps before she ran against a chair, throwing it violently to the floor.

"Madam, beware!" cried her guest, springing after her, and reaching out to save her from falling over the obstacle.

"I am not harmed!" she said, in clear, ringing, impatient tones. "Pray return to your seat."

"But I appear to have startled you!" protested subtle Joel Brinton. "Can you have divined the misfortune that has fallen upon poor Beatrice? You know her? You are her friend? Perhaps you can tell me—"

"What misfortune has befallen her?" asked the Spanish woman, ignoring his other questions.

"She has been made away with—abducted."

"What! by him?—by Black-Hoss Ben? Ha! ha! you are foolish! It is an elopement, if you have sought to exercise any control over her, and she has eluded you."

The hot, bitter words betrayed this woman's secret.

"On the contrary," said Joel Brinton, "it is to Black-Hoss Ben that I am to look for aid in effecting her recovery—if indeed it is not too late!"

His conscience smote him. How could he trifle with this vixen while poor Beatrice might even now be weeping her life away in irredeemable despair?

True, he had come here in search of a clew. But it was like treason to Jack's unhappy child, to have allowed himself to be allured by that voice which was now so changed, and by that hand which was no doubt as ready with a dagger-thrust as with a caress.

Guided only by his voice, the Golden Serpent glided swiftly up to him, with hands extended in the darkness, and when they came in contact with him, seized his hands.

"Swear to me," she cried, thrusting a crucifix into his hand, "that she is not with him—not with Black-Hoss Ben!"

"I have no such positive assurance—"

"Ah! you are a fool!"

This interruption was fairly hissed in his face; and the excited woman flung his hands away disdainfully.

"Have patience!" pleaded the man who was now thoroughly disenchanted, whatever her late attraction for him. "I did not see her abductor, and so cannot swear to his identity; but I have the best of reason for believing that Black-Hoss Ben has no connection with her disappearance."

"What reason?" asked the Spanish woman shortly.

"This: that she was apprehensive of some danger, the nature of which she did not confide to me; but she urged me, if anything befell her, to seek out Black-Hoss Ben and secure his aid, since he, better than any one else, knew and could circumvent her enemy."

"Ah! did she say that? Tell me!—did she say that? She had an enemy from whom Black-Hoss Ben would rescue her! Did she tell you this? And her enemy,—she did not confide to you his name? But why should she not? Why should she seek to shield him from— Ah! Holy Mother! I see it all!"

These words were shot forth so rapidly that they fairly stumbled over one another.

Once more the woman approached him, and in her excitement caught his hands.

"Look you!" she cried. "Black-Hoss Ben is the last man in all the world whom you should seek!"

"I shall be obliged to you if you tell me why," observed Joel Brinton, a little dryly.

"And nothing would delight me more! Come! you do not know this Black-Hoss Ben?"

"No, I have not as yet that privilege."

"Yet you instinctively distrust him. You implied as much. You said that you were afraid that your business with him was the reverse of hostile."

"I have no right to prejudge—"

"Nevertheless you do not look with complacency on the chance of intimate association between him and the daughter of your friend! Come! Let us not quibble over meaningless

words, when we have such serious facts to engage us!"

"Well, what then?"

"If he rescue her— But first tell me how is it that she is not with Black-Hoss Ben? Have they quarreled? But if so, why does she look to him to save— Ah! to be sure!—it is her will that banishes him! She has but to cry out to him to bring him back to her feet! Say, is it so?—they have quarreled?"

So the problem was thought out and spoken as rapidly as the words could be articulated.

Joel Brinton reflected that it was now necessary to disregard Beatrice's reserve, and that in order to be in a position to protect her, he must probe her secret.

The opportunity was here at his hand.

"I only know that they parted in my presence," he said.

"With the appearance of estrangement?"

"Yes."

"Now God be praised!" cried the woman, so beside herself with fierce delight that all womanly reserve was swept to the winds. "That gulf shall never be bridged over!"

"Pardon me!" said Joel Brinton. "Her commission to me was to find Black-Hoss Ben and enlist—"

"Which you will disregard."

"Not without a better reason than I have at present."

"Oh! you shall have the best of reasons—a reason that will satisfy your nicest scruples."

"Excuse me, if, under the circumstances, I say that I shall feel bound to scrutinize it narrowly before allowing it to determine my action."

"You shall have every latitude of corroboration."

"I await your pleasure."

"Well, then, it is probably apparent to you, that the relations between your friend's daughter and Black-Hoss Ben, are not of ordinary acquaintance merely."

"Well?"

"And that if he is called in by her to snatch her from the power of a rival, the barrier at present between them, whatever it is, will be broken down—that she cannot accept such a service from him without virtually giving herself to him."

"Well?"

"Well! Do you know who this Black-Hoss Ben is? That evidently is not his baptismal name."

"It is Hamilton, I believe."

"Ha! ha! You are not the first to believe that which is not true!"

"You may be able to set me right."

"Assuredly! His name is Langley—Richard Langley! And who is Richard Langley?"

"I am as eager to learn as you are, apparently, to tell me."

"It behoves you to be! Richard Langley is Tiger Dick!—Tiger Dick the gambler!—Tiger Dick the road-agent!—Tiger Dick the murderer! Is that enough? Have you now the secret of their separation? She learned who he was, and, like the cold-blooded reptiles of your icy North, threw him over! Bah! your women do not know the fiery thrill of love! It never wraps them as in a flame, until the senses reel! They higgle for their paltry place in the world when heaven opens to them! Lest some one point the finger of scorn at her as the murderer's bride, she cast him from her, careless if she broke his heart and her— But no! she will survive it! What we of the sunny South call destruction, death, hell!—you of the frigid North call a disappointment!"

"But even she is human. Snatched from the clutch of a man whom she loathes into the breast of one she adores, even she will forget, in the rapture of that moment, the blood on his hands. As for me, I would wipe it off with my hair!—nay! I would kiss the red palm of my hero—my love! my love!"

She was swept away in the flood of her imagination. It was plain to her auditor, that she pictured herself in that relation to Tiger Dick. Such fiery passion as burst from her lips he had believed never realized in life.

The intensity of her interest in the issue, naturally roused his suspicion, and he asked her:

"What is Tiger Dick to you?"

"Nothing," she replied—"only a god who has deigned to push me out of his way with his foot!"

Joel Brinton stared—though he could see nothing—with amazement. Here was a new order of woman, surely!

"What proof have I of what you tell me?" he asked.

The woman laughed sarcastically.

"What a change has come over your gallantry!" she said.

"Is that an evasion?" he asked coldly.

"By no means."

"Prove it."

"How?"

"By frankness."

"I will. Go out into the street; ask the first man you meet whether Black-Hoss Ben and Tiger Dick are one and the same; then ask the second man you meet the history of Tiger Dick. When you are satisfied—"

"What then?"

"Come back to me and I will tell you how you can dispense with his services."

Already prejudiced against the Tiger, Joel Brinton lent a ready ear to detraction.

"All I wish to learn from him," he said, "is the name of Miss Holyoke's enemy—who and what he is, and where he may be found."

"All of which I will tell you in his stead."

"Tell me now."

"No; substantiate my word first."

"I have no doubt—"

"I do not wish you to have any at some future crisis. Your prejudice against him sways you now. I cannot afford to have your prejudice against me unsettle you just when everything depends on your remaining steadfast in certainty."

Another moment and she would have dismissed him. But the fate of empires has often turned on a moment; and this time fate was against Joel Brinton.

Even as she advanced to lead him to the door whence he would have passed into the street—there came a furious clatter of hoofs, abruptly brought up before the house; then doors were hurriedly opened and shut, and the tramp of heavy boots approached along the corridor.

"Ah! Mother of God! we are lost!" cried the Golden Serpent.

"What's that?" asked her startled guest.

"My husband!"

CHAPTER VII.

LIKE A RAT IN A TRAP.

A COLD perspiration started on Joel Brinton's bald head, but he said, boldly:

"Well, I don't owe him anything."

"Holy Virgin! but he is as jealous as a Turk! He will slay us both before a word can be urged in explanation!"

The very house seemed to tremble beneath the heavy tread of this terrible husband?

"Good heavens, woman!" cried the old beau, whose courage was sapped by the consciousness of being in a false position, "why have you kept me in ignorance of your having a husband!"

"Are we to waste time in idle reproaches? Come, you cannot stay here."

"Show me the way out, then."

And the unhappy man set out to grope in the darkness for the nearest wall, somewhere in which he might find an exit.

As for direction, he was conscious only of that in which those heavy boots were coming!

The lady caught his arm.

"Come! come!" she panted, dragging him after her.

Blindly he submitted to her guidance.

He had taken but a few steps when he brushed through the curtains behind which she had stood while holding the lighted match for him to recover his handkerchief.

He could guess what sort of an apartment they were entering only by inference; yet he feared that this was going out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Then flashed through his brain the fatal interrogatory:

"Is it a plot? I am to be murdered under color of having trespassed here!"

So startling was this thought, that he did not notice, until it was gone beyond recovery, that the curtain, in brushing over his head, had dragged off his handkerchief.

His frantic clutch was delayed just an instant too long, and only resulted in tearing the curtain loose from one of its rings, and breaking the hold of his invisible guide.

She uttered a fierce oath of impatience in Spanish, and clutched him again, crying:

"Would you delay until he is upon us? He is at the very door!"

That was only too true.

Joel Brinton heard him turn the knob and stride across the threshold, crying out, in a tone of eager affection:

"My Pipa! Ah! you are all in the dark!"

Even while the deep bass voice of the man, whom Joel Brinton's imagination pictured as a veritable giant, prevented him from hearing the unavoidable noises made by hurried movements in the next room, a door was opened and our unlucky hero unceremoniously pushed through, with this charge hissed into his ear:

"Not a sound! not a breath! as you value life!"

The door was instantly closed behind him and a key turned, while yet his head whirled with bewilderment.

He had thought this an avenue of escape, out of doors or into some corridor; but as he stepped over the threshold he brought up against the edges of some boards—evidently shelves.

Then a cold perspiration started on his bald head. He was locked in a closet, with a jealous husband on the other side of the door!

Unfortunately, the innocence of his presence there would not make that barrier more than an inch thick, and pine at that!

But then his nostrils were assailed by the odor of preserves and other comestibles; and this, confirmed by the sense of touch, assured him that he was *only* in a pantry!

The room beyond, then, was probably a dining

room. Fortune might have hit him a sorrier buffet!

However, everything depended upon the disimulation of the wife.

He was reassured as to her genius in that direction by her greeting:

"Delight of my heart!"

And, hey presto! the voice that had hissed that injunction so fiercely into his ear had returned to its mellifluous cadences.

The receding swish of her garments, the tramp of the top-boots arrested in the middle of the next room, and then the sound of a hearty kiss blended with a murmur of delight, completed the picture of deception.

In his closet Joel Brinton made a wry face.

"A pretty go!" he reflected. "Here I'm doomed to listen to the billing and cooing of that ass and the villainous little fraud who leads him by the nose!"

The next words, however, on the other side of the door presented the husband in a more formidable character.

"A light!—let us have a light!"

And, lo! Blue Beard again!

Joel Brinton's heart sunk in dismay.

"He will discover that accursed handkerchief! If ever I get at the man who is at the bottom of all my misery springing from the loss of that wig, I'll have his heart's blood!"

"What have you been doing in the dark, little one?"

"What should I be doing, my *Adan*?"—translating his name caressingly into Spanish.

"Plotting mischief, I'll be bound!"

"Thinking of one forgetful of me?"

"Strike a light; then look me in the eye and pronounce that heresy!"

"Sit down, my *Adan*. I do not wish you to see my face while you tell me what you have done."

What was the meaning of the sudden change in the woman's voice? It was now serious, even apparently constrained.

The man too passed abruptly from lover's badinage to dogged anger, as he answered:

"Nothing!—nothing but go on a fool's errand."

"He has escaped?"

"Yes."

"But you have not abandoned the project?"

"Not I!"—savagely.

"What do you propose to do?"

"I have hit upon nothing, as yet; but one way or another I shall dog him to death!"

A pause followed this threat, during which the man beat his foot impatiently on the floor.

"*Adan*," said the woman, presently, "let us forget this!"

Then followed a wheedling siege, in which she exercised all the subtle tactics of her sex, and to which the man capitulated after a little resistance.

Joel Brinton suffered all the disgust of one forced to listen to this sort of interchange in which he has no share.

After an interval which seemed to him interminable the woman said, as if the thought had just recurred to her:

"By the way, what did Tom want?"

"Tom? I didn't know that he wanted anything."

"Ah, truly! You came direct to me, and so missed him. He came in hurriedly, asking for you, just after you went away. And it must be time for me to be getting ready for my work."

By the rustle of her dress Joel Brinton inferred that the speaker rose. The thud of the top-boots showed that the man also got upon his feet.

"But, *carissima*," he said, "I have not yet seen your sweet face."

"Confound him!" muttered the prisoner, "when she had worked that thing up so nicely! She's a born actress! But then they all are, when it comes to pulling the wool over a man's eyes. It's all up, now, though. There's my hat, too! I wonder if she has had the wit to kick it under the divan in the darkness."

It was "all up," as far as getting rid of her too affectionate husband without striking a light was concerned. There could be no further excuse.

"Now for it!" thought Joel Brinton, as he heard the crackle of a match.

The next words sent his heart thumping like a trip-hammer.

"Why so pale, petite? And you are agitated. What is the matter?"

"The jade!" groaned the imprisoned Joel. "She is going to break down, and betray herself—and me!"

But the Golden Serpent was not at the end of her resources yet.

The old gentleman in the closet heard her sobbing, her voice muffled as if she had cast herself into Blue Beard's arms, hiding her face in his breast.

"Well, well! what can the matter be?"

"*Adan*, do you love me?"

"Good! good!" reflected the anxious listener, rubbing his hands in delighted appreciation. "She's humbug incarnate; and she'll pull me through—see if she don't!"

"Love you?" repeated the husband. "Why, of course I do!"

"But as you did before—before—"

She broke down, sobbing, and evidently pressing her face closer into his breast.

"There! we won't say anything more about that!" said the husband, his voice, though, meant to be reassuring, yet veined with strong feeling.

But the woman would not be comforted; and presently she put him away from her, pleading:

"Go! Leave me to myself a little while! I will come out to you shortly."

"Pipa!"

"Heaven knows that I have had but one thought, and that all of you!"

"You do not think that I doubt it?"

"All my life will prove it to you! But give me a moment alone now."

"Was there ever such a swindle?" cried Joel Brinton to himself, his admiration for the cunning of the woman only equaled by his contempt for the man who was being so beguiled.

But the next instant his heart sunk in dismay. He was assailed by a demon which he could not put off by soft words.

He struggled manfully. He clapped both hands over nose and mouth; but it was of no avail. He swore, he raved in dumb agony.

A moment would save him. The man was already going toward the door, all unsuspecting. But the tickling in his nose was remorseless. The explosion came all the mere violent because of the fierce effort at repression.

"'Chew!'

In the convulsive burst Joel bumped his head against the closet door, and made it rattle again.

He heard a low, suppressed cry of dismay from the woman.

The tramp of the top-boots toward the outer door was abruptly arrested, and their wearer exclaimed, sharply:

"Eh! what's that?"

"That? What?" asked the woman. "I heard nothing."

"Your usual acuteness of hearing has been suddenly impaired then," said the man, in slow, tense, ominous tones, his suspicions plainly roused.

"Ah! Mother of God! what is this?" cried the woman, at a white-heat of indignant passion—*seemingly!* "Why this sarcasm, sir?"

"From the same cause as your involuntary ejaculation but a moment ago, and your extreme pallor—your dismay, madam!"

"My ejaculation? my dismay?"

"At the sneezing, as inopportune as unexpected, of a gentleman—above all, so near!"

"That fellow is the devil himself!" thought Joel Brinton, as he listened to the withering scorn of his sneer.

"A man!" repeated the Golden Serpent.

"In yonder room, madam—where you have been 'thinking of one who was forgetful of you,' you remember—in the dark!"

"Now may heaven's lightnings fall upon this slanderer! You love me!—you who have stabbed me to the heart!"

She seemed to choke with passion.

"By Jove! she carries it with a high hand!" thought the helpless victim in the closet. "If she bluffs him, I'll always maintain that nothing is impossible to a woman with wit and without a conscience!"

But her next words caused him to cry within the secret chambers of his soul:

"Good heavens! She can't have such audacity."

And his heart leaped into his mouth, and an icy chill ran from the nape of his neck to the end of his spine.

Like the bursting of a flood through a crevasse the woman poured the torrent of her indignation on the man who had roused her fiery nature.

"Stay!" she cried. "You shall go into this room! You shall see with your own eyes that there is no man there, save the foul creature of your infamous imagination! Then I will spurn you from me!—I will spit upon you! Wretch! vilifier! Ah, God! that I should have demeaned myself to the caresses of—of—Come! come! you shall see!"

The unlucky provoker of this lava-tide of scorn was stunned by it.

"Pipa!" he expostulated.

"No! I swear you shall never leave me until you have gone into that room! Come! come!"

And she dragged him forward.

The rings fairly hissed along the rod that carried them, as she tore aside the curtain.

"There is the room! And here, here is the light! Come! I will be your candle-bearer! We will seek this man together!"

She laughed with fierce, hyena-like fury.

"Listen to me, Pipa," said the man, his voice indicating that he stood on the threshold between the two apartments.

"Never!" she cried. "The sneezing of that man of yours will forever ring in my ears, so as to shut out your hateful voice! So! you are satisfied? Now listen to me! If I had the power of the archangel—"

But at this point she was interrupted by an ejaculation from the man.

"Eh? What's this?"</p

The Golden Serpent uttered a despairing Spanish oath under her breath.

His eye had fallen upon Joel Brinton's handkerchief, which he stooped to pick up.

"A handkerchief!" he said. "And oddly tied. A handkerchief of unusual size and quality for a lady!—more suitable for one of the opposite sex, I should say."

The woman snatched it from him, threw it on the floor, and stamped on it.

"Bah!" she cried. "I was fool enough to wish to prepare a little comedy for your entertainment! I found the handkerchief in the saloon last night. But, come! you are bound to find a man in the case. But a moment ago it was some one sneezing in the street; now it is a handkerchief; presently it will be—"

"A hat! By heaven, I have unmasked you!"

"Ah, *Dios!*" gasped the woman.

While she was explaining the presence of the handkerchief, he had been running his eye about the room for confirmation of his re-aroused suspicions, and had discovered the hat where she had skillfully kicked it.

She was at the end of her tether at last. She made no further effort at denial, but only stared at him in mute terror.

The man's face looked demoniac in its white fury.

He plucked his revolver from its holster on his hip.

He took a single stride toward the culprit.

She shrank from him; but he only snatched the lamp from her hand, perhaps fearing that she would blow it out, or possibly only that she might faint and let it fall.

Then he leveled his weapon, not at her, but at the pantry door.

The woman screamed, not with concern for the man who had come to this deadly peril through her invitation, but at this ruthless tearing aside of her mask of deceit.

Her voice blent with a rapid succession of ringing reports, as the man emptied chamber after chamber of his revolver into the pantry door.

The screams and firing startled the gamblers in the outer saloon; and they came rushing down the corridor, to the scene of violence.

For the second time that night, but now more desperately than before, as the splinters flew in his face and he felt a bullet plow its way through his flesh, the prisoner in the pantry cried:

"My God! I'm a dead man!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BLUFFING A SHERIFF.

IT now becomes necessary to follow another thread of our story, the scene opening on a wild mountain road, a few hours earlier in the day of Joel Brinton's coming to Coyote.

The air rings with the clang of iron-shod hoofs, as a cavalcade of six horsemen, riding two abreast, press their beasts forward at full gallop.

The men in advance are, one of portly build, and one with the physique of an athlete.

The former wears a long black beard, which hides the expression of his face, all but eyes that glow with malicious resolve.

The latter is clean-shaven. His face is stern, with the hardness of a man of iron will; but it is honest.

They are followed by men of no particular note, except that they are hardy, active fellows, ready for any emergency.

All are covered with dust, as with hard riding.

"I have followed him across the continent and back," said he of the shaven face—Jim Farnsworth, the Frisco sheriff. "He has given me the slip once, and fairly downed me in a second bout; but I propose to hunt him to his grave—or my own!"

"It won't be my fault," responded Adam Farley, with a scowl of hatred, "if you don't tree him to-day."

"Do you suppose we shall meet any opposition from the men of Mulligan's Bend? That is the worst of taking a criminal in this country. The boys all stand in with him, if he has the knack of making himself popular."

"If we had him in Coyote, I could promise you that he would receive scant favor. You ought to let me fetch along a crowd that would leave their whisky any day for the chance of walking through Mulligan's Bend."

"No; I don't want a general row. With my four fellows and the law, I can single him out; where, in a promiscuous set-to, if one man got out alive, he'd be that man."

"Is he such a terrible fellow as all that comes to?"

"There's but one Tiger Dick—and don't you forget it!"

"I'd guarantee to take the tiger out of him, if I had your warrant for it."

Jim Farnsworth turned his head, and looked at the man who rode beside him.

He read murder in the savage scowl that disfigured the face of his companion.

"Understand," he said, in stern, measured tones, "the law hangs men, instead of shooting

them; and," he added, with a changed significance indicated by a slow, lingering emphasis, "*I represent the law!*"

At that Adam Farley turned his head; and for an instant these two men looked into each other's souls.

The sheriff bore the ordeal unmoved; but a dull red flush rose to Adam Farley's forehead, and his eyes fell.

As plainly as if words had been employed, along the lightnings of that level glance was conveyed to him the warning that, if he accidentally shot Tiger Dick in the coming encounter, Jim Farnsworth was just the man to hold him to a rigid accountability.

After that they rode on in silence, until they dashed into a straggling mining-camp which boasted the not very aristocratic name of Mulligan's Bend.

There were evidences of unusual excitement plainly visible, as if some stirring event had recently shaken the camp to its center.

Men were lounging about in the one straggling street, gossiping in interested groups.

As the horsemen dashed up, eager calls passed from group to group, and men came running from every direction.

"What's up now, gents?" was the general demand.

Without orders, which showed that they acted by preconcerted arrangement, two of the subordinates had pulled up at the end of the street at which they entered, while two dashed on through the camp, to take up their position at the other end, the sheriff and Adam Farley drawing rein in the heart of the place, before Dan O'Driscoll's saloon.

At sight of Adam Farley the men of Mulligan's Bend scowled with undisguised dislike, a favor which he returned with haughty disdain.

"Thar's that sport from Coyote—the Golden Serpent's man."

"I'd like to know what he's up to now."

"Reckon he didn't git his fill yistid."

"We ain't a-givin' of him no points, ye understand."

"Right you air, boss!"

"Gentlemen," said Jim Farnsworth, "can you tell me where I will find Tiger Dick?"

"Tiger Dick?" repeated one of the men, looking from the sheriff to his companions inquiringly.

Several shook their heads.

"Hain't no sich chap beknownst to none o' the boys, I reckon."

"He is the man who, in company with Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport, has made it so particularly red-hot in this place and Coyote for the last forty-eight hours," explained the sheriff, not at all taken in by their disclaimer.

"Oh! that galoot?" was the reply, with an air that was "childlike and bland" in its simplicity. "Waal, I allow as how he has pulled out o' the sidin' on to the main line, an' gone down the grade."

"How long is it since he left the camp?"

"That I can't say, for a sure-nough fact."

"Thar's the gent what the Sportive plugged, as is layin' over in Six-foot Si's shanty," suggested one of the bystanders. "Mebby, now, he's the party to let you into his pard's moves."

"Six-foot Si?"

"The head-center o' this hyar camp, boss."

"Where is his shanty?"

"Over yon."

"There's some one standing in the door now," said the sheriff, glancing in the direction indicated.

"That thar's yer man, Cap."

It was a man of magnificent proportions, standing full six feet, if not more—a blonde giant, with a frank, bold countenance.

His breast was covered by a tangled beard, like a lion's mane.

He was bare-headed; yet he looked their way against the sun without shading his eyes.

"By Jove! a noble-looking fellow!" said Jim Farnsworth, involuntarily.

He knew a manly man when he saw him, and was frank in his admiration, be he friend or foe.

"Now ye're shoutin', Cap!" cried one of Six-foot Si's townsmen, heartily.

Jim Farnsworth turned quickly toward the speaker, and saw a smile on his face. He knew that his generous tribute to Six-foot Si had won over one man from the suspicion and dislike that had greeted him on his entrance into the camp.

He said nothing then, but resolved to have an interview with this man before he took his departure.

For the present, he rode forward to accost Six-foot Si himself.

"This is Six-foot Si, I believe?"

"That's the handle I travel under. I wish you well."

"I am Sheriff Farnsworth, of Frisco. I have come to your camp with a warrant for the arrest of one Richard Langley. You probably know him as Tiger Dick. I understand that he has been making himself rather conspicuous in these parts for the last two or three days; and I have been led to expect that I might find him at Mulligan's Bend."

"All right, stranger. Clap on to him, ef you find him. I don't see nothin' to hinder."

"But seeing that I come as the representative

of the law, don't you think it your duty to offer me such assistance as you can?"

"Waal," boss," said Si, bluntly, "you have the look of an honest man, an' I hain't got nothin' ag'in' you personally; but I find you in worse company than the man you're huntin'—I'm free to say that."

"Haw! haw! haw! We'll all back that; eh, fellers?"

A yell of assent showed that Adam Farley was in bad odor in Mulligan's Bend, whatever his popularity elsewhere.

He scowled blackly.

Six-foot Si went on coolly, without looking at him:

"Therefore, fur my part, I ain't throwin' no tricks into your hand, ye understand."

"You won't tell me whether Tiger Dick is secreted in this camp?"

"H'waal, boss!" with that blending of a laugh with speech with which one receives a preposterous suggestion, "I take it that you ain't very well posted as to what-fur man Tiger Dick is."

"Oh! I know him very well. I ought to. I've been on his trail two years."

"Is that so? Then all I've got to say is, that you've put in your time blamed poorly."

The crowd laughed hoarsely; but the sheriff kept his temper.

"How so?" he asked.

"Is Tiger Dick the sort o' man to go sneakin' round under cover?" answered Si.

"Well, that depends. Few men in this section of country go out of their way to shake hands with the sheriff, I reckon."

Six-foot Si laughed frankly.

"I allow thar's somethin' in that, pardner," he admitted.

"If I search for my man, I suppose there will be no opposition?" suggested the sheriff.

"Oh, waal," said Si, with a shrug, "I reckon thar's nothin' ag'in' your nosin' about as much as you please. This hyer's a free country. But then, understand, every man's house is his castle; an' ef you run ag'in' any stray bullets, it's your own lookout."

"I'll take my chances of that," said the sheriff, coolly.

Six-foot Si looked at him with an approving light in his eye. As he had put it, he had "nothin' ag'in' him personally."

The sheriff's business interview with Six-foot Si was now over, but he went on, pleasantly:

"I understand that you have in there a man who was shot in a duel this morning."

A troubled look flitted across Six-foot Si's ingenuous countenance.

"That's so, boss," he said. "But it was in a fair fight: an' I allow everybody is satisfied. Thar ain't no hard feelin's on Iron Despard's side—I'll guarantee that."

As he spoke he saw the face of the sheriff suddenly light up with keen admiration.

Following Farnsworth's eager glance, he turned just in time to see the white curtain that screened the window fall back to place.

The Frisco sheriff had been favored with the sight of a beautiful face framed in the most lovely shade of golden auburn hair he had ever seen.

A lady had drawn the curtain aside to look into the street, evidently curious to see what was going on before the shanty.

Her eyes were red, as if with weeping; yet her face was all aglow with a wondrous gladness.

"Good Heaven!" thought the sheriff. "It's worth being shot, to make such a woman look like that!"

He was hardly composed enough to speak in his ordinary tones, again addressing Six-foot Si.

"How is he likely to come on?"

The whole expression of Si's face and tone changed to cold repellence, as he replied:

"I reckon he'll do, sir."

That "sir" clinched the matter.

Fully understanding what such formality signifies in the West, the sheriff took his leave at once.

For the remainder of the day he addressed himself to the delicate task of trying to ascertain whether the man he sought was secreted in the camp, or had left it in time to escape him.

While he was thus employed, a succession of sharp reports, like the crack of fire-arms, followed by a furious rattle and clatter, came from beyond the "Horse-shoe," as the head of the mountain-run on which the place was located was called.

Under the inspiration of these sounds, the whole camp brightened with interest, and from every direction men lounged toward the Mountain House, "Dan O'Driscoll, proprietor," until quite a crowd received the Overland coach, as it drew up with a grand flourish.

Just before he braced himself to draw his horses upon their haunches, Sam Seaver threw back his head, opening his cavernous mouth to its widest extent, and at the same time making a motion over his shoulder with his whip. As he recovered himself, he executed a wink that seemed to drop the whole of one side of his face.

Whatever the significance of this peculiar pantomime, it sent a wave of excitement through the crowd.

Everybody "braced up." Several set their hats with a more jaunty cant on their heads. One took a huge quid of tobacco from his mouth into his hand and threw it away, wiping the hand on the seat of his trowsers.

Then all waited on the *qui vive*.

CHAPTER IX.

"STRUCK WHAR HE LIVES."

In the expectant crowd was a personage who, in Western parlance, "had some style about him."

He was of slender build, with a thin, flexible face, clean-shaven but for a goatee which adorned his pointed chin.

His elegant emaciation was due to dissipation, which also left his eyes bloodshot and the edges of the lids inflamed.

He wore a jaunty short sack-coat of velvet, without any vest, over a "b'iled" shirt, and black pantaloons, purposely made too long, and turned up at the bottom so as to display the canvas stiffening.

Setting his hat a little further over his left eye, this elegant gentleman sought to elbow his way forward through the crowd, when a rough fellow, with a protruding chin and very decided bumps of combativeness behind his ears, stepped before him, saying:

"Hold on, Johnny! Ye ain't the man to open that hearse door, ye understand!"

"That's what's the matter with Hannah!" chimed in another. "Hyar comes Six-foot Si. Thar don't nobody touch that thar shebang when he's around—not when thar's a special waybill, cully!"

Six-foot Si, the magnate of Mulligan's Bend, did not disdain to honor the appearance of the Overland coach, the great event of the day, with his presence.

Everybody made way for him, with expectant smiles. One favored him with a wink and a sly poke in the ribs, saying, guardedly:

"Touch 'er up tenderly, ole man!"

"Leave Si alone," said another. "Ef he don't know how to do this hyar camp proud, it's about time to shut up shop, accordin' to my calculation."

"Save the rest o' that chin fur—"

"Dry up yerself, will ye?"

In the midst of these admonitory mutterings the coach drew up; but it had scarcely come to a standstill when the door was thrown open from within, before Six-foot Si could perform the disputed office.

The impatient occupant of the coach appeared at once, in the person of a lady who, emerging, paused with her foot on the step while she scanned the rude faces that greeted her with eager curiosity and admiration.

All saw that she was beautiful; but what was most impressive—even startling—was the burning intensity of her searching gaze, as it swept over the crowd.

It seemed that she did not find among them the face she sought; for a cloud of disappointment settled over her countenance, and with a weary sigh she prepared to descend from the vehicle.

At sight of her a wave of crimson surged to the roots of Si's hair, and then receded, leaving him pale and with his iron nerves vibrating as they never had done with fear.

He was so overpowered that he lost all presence of mind, and instead of springing to her assistance with his wonted gallantry, stood staring at her, with only one thought flashing through his brain:

"What wouldn't I give to have her look like that after me?"

The man who had championed him saw Si's predicament.

"Hang the ornery galoot!" he muttered. "What's the matter with him? Blow me ef he ain't completely flabbergasted!"

And he poked him in the back, by way of recalling him.

But this friendly reminder came too late. The "Daisy" whose gallantry had been nipped in the bud saw his chance, "an' went fur it, thar an' then."

While Six-foot Si's wits were wool-gathering he slipped before him, and doffing his hat with a grand salaam, extended his hand, saying:

"Madam, allow me!"

The lady accepted the proffered hand with a courteous, though rather absent:

"Thank you, sir!"

And so alighted, and was led into the "hotel," with a ceremonious gallantry that would have appeared laughable to an Eastern man.

Some were "tickled," some indignant, at the trick the Daisy had played on Six-foot Si; yet not a trace of either emotion was allowed to appear on their grave faces, as they flattened themselves against the wall, standing uncovered to let the lady pass.

Hat in hand, the Daisy escorted the camp's fair guest into the house.

Si's disappointed champion shook his fist at his back; and the moment the lady was beyond earshot, he burst forth:

"Fur unadulterated cheek that thar scalawag

would bu'st a brass cannon wide open, I'll be blowed!"

"It runs in the fam'ly, Yokum," laughed one. "He had an uncle onc't what was a lightnin'-rod man."

"He'd play draw'r-poker with a dead man fur his coffin, and steal four kings and an ace off him, he would!" muttered Yokum, in intense disgust.

"What'll you take fur yerself, Si?" chaffed another.

Six-foot Si did not smile, though he took the banter good-naturedly.

"Boys," he said, "ef you'll go in to Dan, he'll make it right with you."

It needed no prophet to interpret this into an invitation to an "all-hands-round" at the speaker's expense.

They entered the saloon, to find the Daisy leaning against the bar in a graceful attitude, and toying with a toothpick.

He regarded them with a smile of complacent triumph.

"Gosh hang you, Daisy!" cried Yokum, "I'll be blowed ef I hain't two minds to straddle you!"

"Would you have the lady wait all day, while somebody was making up his mind whether to help her down or not?"

"Waal, it wa'n't your put in, not by a long chalk."

"What's the reason it wasn't?"

But Six-foot Si saw that this question might lead to uncomplimentary personalities; so he interposed.

"That's all right, Yokum. If you want to eucher the Daisy, you'd better put in yourself, next time."

"Shoot me ef I don't!"

"He-ur's phwat will make it right all round, b'y's," said Dan O'Driscoll, as he put bottles and glasses on the bar.

He had just made his appearance, looking very red in the face.

"God be good to uz, ma'am!" was the touch of blarney with which he had received his guest from the Daisy. "Sure, it's good-luck a lady loike yerself will be bringin' to this house, the day."

Passing this by, she had looked searching into his face, and asked, abruptly:

"Can you tell me whether there is such a person as Robert Cady in this camp?"

O'Driscoll stepped back against the wall, staring at the speaker wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

To his superstitious soul this unexpected demand for the man who was but just dead, was as startling as if this pale woman of the burning eyes were one come from the other world.

"The—the—which is it?" he stammered, feeling as if his hair were on end.

"Robert Cady. Do you know him?"

"Do I know um? Ahem! That is to say, do I know um? The which ye might be calling um—Did I understand yez, ma'am?"

The Irishman floundered wretchedly, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, wiping his nose with the back of his hand, and scratching his scrubby chin.

"Devil swape the likes o' me!" he was thinking, "phwat will I tell her, anyways?"

The lady was already beginning to look at him curiously, when his good angel came to his relief in the person of Mrs. O'Driscoll—a red-headed and brawny-armed angel!

"Och! go long wid yez! Phwat does the likes o' you know about it at all, at all? Sure, ye'll believe me, ma'am, he's that thick ye'll get nothing out of him. Av ye'll folly me, ma'am, I'll be afther showin' ye yer room, and then we'll find out whativir it is ye're wantin' to know, so we will."

Dan knew that the severity of his spouse was like that of rival attorneys or politicians, who, being bosom friends in social life, blackguard each other in the way of business before their respective clients and constituents.

He availed himself of the opportunity to retreat she thus afforded him: and she, leaving no chance for her guest to resume the awkward theme, led the way down a passage, saying:

"Don't fall over them shovels, ma'am. Sure, a saint wouldn't make this place annything but phwat it is. Don't I be cl'aning from morning till night, till me two har's an' me two feet are ready to drop off? But niver a thing do I set out o' the road but wan o' them b'ys puts two in the place of it. That's min all over, so it is. But I s'pose they're as the Lord made them, ma'am; an' poor crathers they are. But here's yer room, ma'am. I'm sorry it's not a betther."

The lady did not so much as glance at the scant accommodations.

"If you can get me information of Robert Cady," said she, "I will take it more kindly than any other service."

"God help the poor crather!" thought the tender-hearted Irishwoman. "It's a dale o' throuble she's come to this day! Well, well, it's the tay that's a comfort, an' she'll bear it the 'asier afther a good swig o' the same."

But she found it impossible to divert her guest from her one idea; and having led her to the eating-room and placed before her a cup of tea which the other in her anxiety left untasted, she went for Six-foot Si.

So, without a moment's preparation, our blonde giant was hustled into the presence of the woman the mere sight of whom had so deeply moved him.

"I beg yer pardon, ma'am! It is me that ye want to see?" he asked, standing before her hat in hand, and blushing like a school-boy.

"I wish to ask after Robert Cady," she faltered, scanning his face narrowly.

"Robert Cady?" he repeated, to gain time. "He might be a relative of yours?"

"No; but a dear friend." That could mean but one thing.

Once more the color rose in Si's face.

"I'm afraid I hain't got as good news fur you, ma'am, as I wish—"

"Nothing has happened to him?" she panted, rising unsteadily to her feet, and clasping her hands.

Then, as if struck by lightning, her strength failed her, and with a death-like pallor she sunk back in her chair.

"Ye see, he hain't had first-rate luck, Bob hain't," said Si, as if speaking of a friend, though in fact he had never heard of Cady until two days before. "Not that it was his fault, ye understand. He was a squar' man every time, the which it's a doggone shame that thar should be scalawags layin' fur jest sich. An' his pard was the wu'st I ever see, an' that's a fact!"

The suffering woman said not a word, but only gazed at him as if her soul waited in breathless suspense.

"They had a leetle diffikilty, the which thar's too much o' that sort o' thing in this hyer section," pursued Si; "an' Bob, he got hurt."

With the mechanical movement of a corpse galvanized into ghastly semblance of life, the woman pressed her hands on her bosom, her breath stayed, her eyes dilating.

"Ye mustn't take on, ma'am," continued Si, hurrying on. "Them things is common hyer. But I thought ef so be you was a leetle prepared not to find him jest exactly on his feet, ye understand."

Of course the implication of this was that the man was still alive at least.

A profound sigh showed to what a tension the listener's feelings had been wrought.

"He was wounded in an encounter with his partner?"

"That's the size of it, ma'am."

"When?"

"Day before yistidy."

"When I was so near! Thank God for that!"

She began to wring her hands, and now for the first time tears coursed like rain down her cheeks.

"After all these years," she murmured. "I have found him at last—at last!"

Her present mood frightened Six-foot Si. She was beginning to smile hysterically through her tears.

"Good God! what have I done?" he asked himself, reflecting that, with the best of intentions, he had built up false hopes. "I only wanted to break it to her easy; an' hyer I've made it so'st she'll take it harder'n ever!"

The lady rose from her chair.

"I should perhaps have begun by telling you that I am Elizabeth Crawford, and that I am to be Robert's wife, so that I have the right to nurse him back to health. If you will take me to him, I have only to get my bonnet and shawl."

Si stopped her as she was about to leave the room.

"One moment, ma'am," he said. "Ye see, Bob's shanty is quite a smart step up the gulch, and ef so be you'd jest as lieve wait till mornin'—"

"Oh! I cannot wait so long, now that I am so near him, and he is in such need of my care! Pray consider that I have not seen him for years. May I not count on your kindness—"

She "had" him there. He would have given his heart's blood in her service.

"Ef so be half an hour wouldn't be too long—"

"Oh, no! I shall never forget your goodness!"

And she extended her hand gratefully.

Six-foot Si's heart came into his mouth.

"Dog my skin!" he thought, "I hadn't orter touch that thar hand o' hern—I want to, too, thunderin' bad; an'she as good as another man's wife! Ef she knowed, she wouldn't leave me touch it no more'n ef I war a snake! It's takin' a mean advantage of her—it is, by hokey!"

But, on the other hand, it was simply impossible to refuse to take it. So he quieted his conscience, and while the pressure of her soft fingers thrilled him to his heart's core, tried to master the love that seemed like a wrong to the dead and an insult to her whom he honored most.

Having escaped from her presence he expressed her purpose aloud.

"Thar ain't no other way out of it. It'll take a lady like herself to break it to her easy. Now, a great hulkin' feller like me is a bull in a chany shop."

And he proceeded straight to his shanty, into the presence of the woman whom Jim Farnsworth had seen through the window.

CHAPTER X.
A WOMAN'S OATH.

SHE was a woman whose rare loveliness of person had won her the *sobriquet* of Belle the Beautiful, during her life of wild vicissitude in the Western Wonderland.

An abundance of rich, dark, auburn hair was coiled at the back of her head, accompanied by exquisite purity and fairness of complexion. Her features were cast in a mold of sensitive delicacy.

Six-foot Si stood somewhat abashed in her presence, twirling his hat about his hand like an overgrown boy.

The amused twinkle in her blue eyes changed to a look of quick pain as she gathered his mission.

The promptness and fullness of her response showed the warmth of her heart.

"I will go at once," she said.

But before she did so, she turned with a swift, gliding motion to a corner of the room where lay a man in a rude bunk, his face pale with loss of blood, but his eyes burning with a strong, steady glow of inexpressible happiness as they followed her slightest movement.

Taking his head upon her bosom, she gazed at him with mute yearning through gathering tears. Then, with a blended shiver and sob, she dropped her face on his, straining him closer in her arms and whispering in his ear:

"Oh, Despard!"

He read her thoughts. What if the fate of that other poor creature had been hers? What if she had followed him all of those weary miles only to find him dead?

"My darling!" he said, stroking her hair, while he felt her tears rain upon his face, "there is nothing to fear. Do you suppose that anything—anything could part me from you now?"

She recovered herself presently, and left him, going directly to the Mountain House, while Si went to prepare the body of the murdered man for the eye of his sweetheart.

She was received by Mrs. O'Driscoll, and shown in to the stranger without formal introduction.

Going straight up to her, she put her arms about her, saying:

"My dear, I have come to be your friend!"

The stranger received her kiss with some embarrassment at the unusual warmth of her overtures.

Then came a perception of the deep commiseration in her eyes.

"You are very kind," she stammered. "But—but—why do you come to me like this?"

Her voice shook with a growing premonition of the impending blow.

Mrs. Dangerfield felt her tremble in her embrace.

"I have heard your story, dear," she said, "and I want you to feel that you are not among unsympathizing strangers."

"Stop! stop!" cried the other, struggling to rise and escape the arms that still clung about her.

"Hush! hush!" said Mrs. Dangerfield, soothingly.

Then the girl's strength seemed suddenly to leave her.

"Tell me! tell me!" she panted, resting limp in the arms of her comforter.

The latter only kissed her, and let tears of sympathy fall upon her face.

So the truth sunk gently into her heart, without the shock of words.

For a long time she rocked her body to and fro, sobbing and moaning. Then she said:

"He is dead?"

"He loved you till the last," was the reply.

"But when—when did he die? Not now, just as I have found him?" she cried, with a sudden revolt against the cruelty of her fate.

"Only this morning, poor heart!"

With fiery passion the tortured girl rose, casting off the arms that held her, as if they were bonds.

"And he was murdered!" she cried, through set teeth. "Who has robbed me? Where is this treacherous partner of his?"

She stood like a beautiful goddess, her hands clinched, her eyes blazing, her white lips set hard, her figure rigid and drawn to an imperious height.

"Has that swift vengeance for which this wild country is noted been wreaked upon him?" she demanded.

"No. He has escaped."

"Escaped! The murderer of the man he had sworn to stand by in every and any need! Why, Bob wrote me of this pard, as he called him! Once he saved his life, nursing him through mountain fever!"

Mrs. Dangerfield could only sigh her distress.

"The ingrate! The traitor!" cried the other, now beginning to pace the floor.

"Escaped!" she reiterated. "Are they on his track?"

"Oh, my dear!" pleaded Mrs. Dangerfield, "do not harbor such feelings. You are not yourself."

"Myself? No, henceforward I shall never be my old self again! Oh, God! Bob! Bob! Bob!"

She clasped her head in her hands, and cast herself upon the bed, in a paroxysm of grief.

But presently she rose, and demanded hoarsely:

"Take me to him! Let me see him as he lies dead!"

There was a fierceness about her which terrified Mrs. Dangerfield.

"You shall see him in a moment," she said.

"What are they doing?" she asked. "Are they preparing him for my sight? Why did this man Six-foot Si evade me and send you? Where is he now?"

"He is seeing that everything—"

"Is softened down! No! I will not have it so. Let me see him as he lies in his blood! I want something to remember when the time comes—something to nerve my hand!"

Once more her face was distorted by a wild hatred, a fierce resolve, that chilled the blood of the woman who saw her.

She noted the clinched right hand. It suggested a relentless grip on an avenging stiletto.

With her raven black hair now fallen down about her shoulders; her dark eyes, in so marked a contrast with her bloodless face, distended and ablaze with wrath; this woman was a creature of terrible beauty.

There was no staying her. She strode out of the room, forgetful of bonnet or shawl.

Mrs. Dangerfield caught them up, and put them on her as she ran after.

"God spare us!" muttered Mrs. O'Driscoll, crossing herself.

But even she, who would have withstood the best man in the camp, was afraid to expostulate with this one of her own gentle sex now roused to infuriate strength.

So they passed into the street.

It was needless to ask where was the shanty which held Bob Cady's body.

The story of the coming of his sweetheart had sped like wild-fire through the camp, and roused an interest which the mere violence of his death had failed to do, in that country where more men died "with their boots on" than in their beds.

A crowd had gathered about the door of the Mountain House, to be near the woman; another hung about the shanty where he lay.

Through the first crowd the woman passed without heeding them, though they stared at her and followed after, jostling one another in their efforts to keep where they could see her terrible face.

Without seeming to hurry, she strode down the street at a pace that kept Mrs. Dangerfield at a half run, and made the crowd stumble against one another in keeping up to her.

That other staring crowd opened to let her pass in.

Warned by their ejaculations, Six-foot Si came to the door and saw her approaching.

"Good God, men!" he exclaimed, "don't let her come in hyar yet!"

But it was too late. With an imperiousness derived from her strong passion, she awed them all.

"If—if you please, ma'am!" stammered Si, opposing her entrance.

But she waved him aside.

"Let me see him fresh from the hand of his murderer!" she said.

"But—but a lady!"

"Oh, no!" she laughed, disdainfully. "You need not consider my woman's weakness. Henceforth I am of no sex! I am an avenger! Stand aside and let me enter."

There was no resisting her fierce will.

Six-foot Si, conquered by her eye, groaned inwardly as he yielded.

Everything in the shanty was in disarray, showing evidence of hurried preparation to make the corpse presentable.

Two rough pine boards had been laid side by side on a couple of candle-boxes stood on end.

On this rude bier lay the body, naked to the waist, with only a blanket thrown over the lower part.

Beside it stood a bucket of water stained purple with blood. Above the head lay pieces of torn cloth, evidently removed bandages.

On the breast of the dead man gaped several livid wounds from which the blood had ceased to flow.

His jaw was kept up by a bandage; and two oldfashioned cents—borrowed from men who carried them as "pocket-pieces, for luck," and applied to this office with a superstitious feeling that nothing else could be used for the purpose—closed his eyes.

At sight of this ghastly spectacle Mrs. Dangerfield threw her arms about her sister woman, hiding her face in her bosom with a shuddering cry of horror.

"Oh! why did you let her enter here?"

And she strove to force her back.

Her arms were disengaged and she was put aside, with gentle yet irresistible strength.

"Go! Leave me with my dead."

The command was spoken with cold, mechanical precision.

The woman who gazed with no outward sign of emotion upon that at which the other shuddered, did not take her eyes from her murdered love.

Six-foot Si took Mrs. Dangerfield by the arm.

She looked at him appealingly; but he shook his head and led her out.

She was conscious of a new dignity in him. Heretofore he had treated her with nervous, bashful deference. Now he had the quiet positiveness of a man's superior strength and directing will.

He closed the door at his back, and said, in a low, firm voice:

"Boys, git out o' hyer. This is no place fur gapin' curiosity."

And without a word in opposition the crowd dispersed.

In there, alone with her dead, the woman knelt, removing the ghastly coins and turning the lifeless face toward her.

With her fingers she lifted the lids and peered into the blue-glazed eyes.

Never again would they look intelligence into hers!

She kissed the cold, unresponsive lips. Never again would caress of hers wake a glow of tenderness in that pulseless heart.

She laid her cheek against the marble of his. The old warmth was gone forever!

She took his head in her arms and drew it into her bosom, whispering softly:

"Bob! dear Bob!"

No thrill of quickening life ran through his inert frame. The man was dead! dead! dead!

She laid him back tenderly, as if he were sleeping.

Then she pressed her fingers to those cruel wounds—here a knife-thrust, there a bullet-hole.

All this while her eyes were tearless. There are griefs that dry up the well of sorrow.

"Wait! wait!" she said, as if he could hear her. "I am steeling my woman's heart. I want to burn these into my memory, so that when the time comes I may not abate one jot or tittle of the exactin!"

Then with one hand laid on the breast of the dead man and one raised to Heaven, she cried:

"Judge my cause, oh, God!"

And so the night closed in about the living and the dead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TIGER'S CLAW.

It was not until after nightfall that the Frisco sheriff found an opportunity to interview unobserved the man whose favor he seemed to have won by his praise of Six-foot Si.

"Pardner," he said, "I'm an honest man in the discharge of my duty; and I take you to be another. Now, I don't ask you to play the traitor to any man who has the right to expect you to stand by him. But Tiger Dick has no such claim on any honest man. Will you, then, be so good as to tell me whether he is still in this camp?"

"Waal, Cap," said the fellow, shifting a little uneasily from one foot to the other, "you talk like a squar' man, an' that's a fact. I ain't one o' them galoots as gives a man away, ye understand. But I reckon as how it won't do no hurt jest to say that you're barkin' at a last-years bird's-nest, the which Tiger Dick got warnin', an' cut the place about an hour before you showed up."

"I'm obliged to you so far. Would you mind telling me how he got warning?"

"Waal, stranger, I allow to have swung a loose jaw about enough fur one day. Come an' see us ter-morrer; ur, ef ye happen to be busy then, make it next week."

The man laughed at his own wit, as he doffed his hat and made a mock bow to the sheriff.

"I like your style," said Farnsworth, offering his hand frankly, and laughing with him; "and I owe you a return compliment, if the opportunity ever offers, for what you have done for me."

"I needn't ask you not to blow this hyar to the boys, Cap?"

"Certainly not."

And the two parted very well pleased with each other.

The manner of his informant satisfied Jim Farnsworth of his sincerity; so he went to bed feeling that he would have to "lay" for the Tiger again.

That night he was visited by a terrible nightmare. He dreamed that he was being nailed in his coffin while yet alive.

In an agony of horror, he fairly leaped from profound sleep out of bed upon the floor.

The door of his room was quivering with the blows of a hammer.

He woke just in time to make out the last of them.

Then a deathlike silence reigned throughout the house.

As the night was disturbed by no drunken yelling or firing of pistols, it was plain that it must be well toward morning.

Farnsworth usually woke in full possession of his faculties; but his dream had been so vivid that it left him for once in his life in bewilderment.

It was only for a moment, however, in which he heard no retreating footsteps.

Then he sprung to the door, and fearlessly tore it open, exercising, be it understood, the

precaution of holding a revolver in readiness for instant use.

The hall without was pitch dark and as silent as the grave.

But by the faint light coming in through his window from the starlit night, he dimly discerned a white square upon the darker background of his door.

He put his hand to it, and felt a piece of writing paper.

Jim Farnsworth was a man of iron nerve. He scented a mystery, and knew that his best chance of solving it was slipping through his fingers with every flitting moment.

Without an instant's hesitation, then, or heed of the exceptional danger of thus pursuing a prepared enemy in the dark, he leaped into the corridor and ran down its length.

He descried a faint light under a door, and without ceremony burst into the apartment.

He discovered at once that he had intruded into a bedroom—whose, he was not long left to speculate.

On the floor—set in a washbasin for the sake of safety—burned a tallow dip. Before it, to serve as a screen, stood a chair incumbered with what was unmistakably feminine attire.

His eye attracted first by the light, the sheriff had scarcely made this much clear, when his ears were pierced by a shrill shriek, followed by a voice crying lustily:

"Dan! Dan! Fur the love o' God, wake yez! He-ur's a murtherin' devil come to rob uz! Howly Mother, we're kilt intirely!"

And turning his glance toward the shadowed corner of the room, the sheriff saw a woman sitting up in bed, her face framed in a hideous ruffled night-cap. With her hand thrown up on either side, she looked not unlike some grotesque scarecrow; and her untimely visitor experienced a strong impulse to laugh.

But as he looked, a second figure rose at her side; and there was nothing funny about this one, you may believe.

It was crowned by the bullet head and rage-distorted face of a furious Irishman.

Jim Farnsworth had just time to leap back into the darkness as a vivid flash intervened between that face and his own; and the next instant, he heard, or rather felt, the zip of a bullet in uncomfortable proximity to his head!

It was a time which called for prompt action, and the Frisco sheriff had the wit to do the right thing without lengthy premeditation.

Running on his toes, so as to make no noise by which his progress could be traced, he flashed back into his own room, hearing the thud of Dan O'Driscoll's bare feet, as he leaped out of bed to pursue "the murtherin' thafe o' the woruld!"

Jim Farnsworth had one taste which struck the western mind as effeminate. He preferred to sleep in a long muslin night-shirt. This fact now stood him in good stead.

That night he had taken the shirt from his saddle-bags, and then, with a presentiment that an emergency might arise in which it would impede his movements, he had concluded to go to bed in his underclothes.

In this guise had he presented himself at the door of the fair Mrs. O'Driscoll's chamber; and he now fairly dove into the waiting night-shirt, trusting to it to change his appearance so that he would not be recognized, when he presently showed himself out in the hall, which he could hear was rapidly filling with men who had been startled from their sleep by the screams and pistol-shot.

Further, he made two or three deft passes of his fingers through his hair, which gave his head an entirely different outline.

Then he made his appearance at the door of his room, revolver in hand, and with a look of wary questioning on his face.

Doors were opening all along the hall, and men armed like himself, but quite differently garbed, were some peering cautiously forth, others striding boldly out, and loudly and profanely demanding the cause of the uproar.

Dan O'Driscoll, good man, was striding along the passage "with blood in his eye," a cocked weapon in one hand and the candle in the other.

Armed with a broom, Mrs. O'Driscoll marched at the heels of her liego lord, looking more like a scarecrow than ever.

"God save uz all!" shouted the Irishman. "Are we to be kilt in our beds, I dunno? Whayur's the maraudhin' devil? Show um to me!"

"What in Cain's the row?" asked a scantly-dressed miner, who longed to take a hand."

"Row!" repeated Mrs. O'Driscoll, excitedly. "Phwat w'u'd it be but a thafe o' the woruld st'al'in' into our room to murdher an' rob uz! Musha murdher! but he had the look o' the devil an' um!—wid a pistol in wan hand an' a knife the length o' that in the other!"

"Faith, I saw only his face," averred Dan.

"What was he like?" asked the sheriff, with an innocence that would have made a "heathen Chinee" die of envy.

"Well, I couldn't swear to um. Troth, I got but a glimpse, an' shot at phwat I saw."

"Do you suppose you hit him? Is there any blood on the floor?"

Everybody looked, of course without result.

"How was he dressed?" pursued the sheriff, appealing to Mrs. O'Driscoll.

"Pon me sowl, I don't know that," admitted the fair one. "At first I thought it was the devil—no less! Maybe ye'll belave me whin I tell ye he hadn't a rag on um."

At that the men roared with laughter, and proceeded to chaff their hostess.

But she gave as good as was sent, assuring them that he was better-looking than any of them.

The sheriff was thus satisfied of his safety from detection; and being anxious to discover the author of the mysterious missive still nailed to his door, and also to detach it without letting the others into the secret, he urged the search on.

Perverse fate directed Dan O'Driscoll's eye to the paper as he was passing the door; and holding the candle so that he could see what it was, he cried:

"Bedad! an' phwat's this, I dunno?"

All gathered about him, the sheriff apparently as much surprised as any one.

"What's that?" he ejaculated, reading it. "The compliments of Tiger Dick to Jim Farnsworth? Why, it's addressed to me!"

"So it is, man dear."

"The compliments of Tiger Dick to Jim Farnsworth, with regrets that he should be so persistent in hunting his obedient servant down."

"I'll give him reason to regret it before I get through with him!" said the sheriff, menacingly.

"First ketch yer flea!" said the voice almost in his ear.

He turned sharply, almost expecting to be fronted by the redoubtable Tiger himself, knowing so well his dare-devil hardihood.

But he nearly bumped his nose against that of a gaunt miner who was reading over his shoulder, and who now held his position defiantly, looking him in the eye, and demanding:

"Waal, stranger, how's how?"

Jim Farnsworth measured the fellow from head to foot, without replying, and then turned and resumed his reading.

"Tiger Dick has no personal feeling against the Frisco sheriff; but if he is to be thus dogged to death, it is but natural that he should seek ordinary means of self-preservation."

"That means that he's comin' back at ye, boss," said the gaunt miner.

His voice was as near the sheriff's ear as the first interruption had been, but the latter was puzzled to determine whether it was the same or not.

He went on with his reading.

"He begs to remind the sheriff of the old adage: Enough's enough; and too much is a plenty!"

This missive was signed boldly:

"TIGER DICK."

"Waal, gents," said one of the bystanders, "that's what I call drawin' it mild."

"But, pard," said another, "ye hyear me? Thar's a good deal o' pay-dirt to the panful in that thar find!"

"What's the prospect, sheriff?" asked a third, with a challenging grin.

Jim Farnsworth had detached the paper, and was coolly folding it up.

"I propose to make Tiger Dick eat this, or ram it down his throat!" he said.

"Wind!" said the gaunt miner, looking him coolly in the face.

"Will you favor me with your name?" asked the sheriff, politely.

"I'm the Bloomin' Blizzard from Bloody Run! But my ole woman calls me Beauty-spot. I was weaned on grizzly b'ar; an' now I call it a cold day ef I don't git a sheriff an' a deppity ur two fur breakfast."

"Thank you!" said Farnsworth. "I shall know you when I see you again. Good-night, gentlemen."

And stepping across his threshold, he closed the door in their faces.

For a moment they stared blankly at it. Then a resentful scowl appeared on more faces than one.

The Blizzard looked about, and saw that he would receive the moral, if not the physical, support of the crowd, and thereupon drew back as if about to make a battering-ram of his broad shoulder, in an assault on the door.

But a white figure, of more ample proportions than symmetry, thrust itself between him and the door; and there stood Mrs. O'Driscoll, with one fist resting on her hip, and her broom at ground-arms, but held at arm's-length, while she shook her head defiantly, so that the ruffles of her night-cap flapped about her face.

For the rest, her sturdy figure was even more fully clothed than modesty need require. Indeed, she looked as if, in default of a trunk, she carried her complete wardrobe about on her person.

"It's the Bloomin' Blizzard ye air?" she demanded. "Will, sor, I'm the devil's own gran'mother! An' if yez don't make a bloody run out o' this, I'll spoil yer beauty-spot fur yez, so I will!"

The Blizzard stared at her blankly. This was not the kind of warfare he was used to. He found himself in a dilemma, where it was equally humiliating to back out and impossible to go ahead.

"Hoo! hoo!" bellowed a great fellow, in high glee at the turn matters had taken. "Go fur 'im, old woman! I'll hold yer night-cap!"

The "boys," who readily forgot their malice at the prospect of fun, joined in to guy the bully.

"Ef you bolt the madam, you'll git yer a run full!" laughed one.

"When women git their rights, an' run fur sheriff, ye won't chaw up so many fur a squar' meal," suggested another.

"An' this hyar's the feller what was weaned on grizzly b'ar!"

"Boys," said the blow-hard, who had sense enough to know when he had "bit off more than he could chaw," "it wa'n't she b'ar, an' that's a fact! Ma'am, ef you'll excuse me, I'll go an' git somethin' on me more'n my shirt an' trowsers, 'fore I ketch cold in my chest, bein's as I'm rather delicate."

"Well, I've but wan thing to say," affirmed Mrs. O'Driscoll. "Ye'll not row in me house. I'm that decent, annyways! Is it that Tiger Dick that has the impudence o' the devil to come till the slapin' room o' a decent woman like meself? Faith, I hope the sheriff will clap the irons on um this day, an' bring him here till I give um a pace o' me mind that'll cost um nothin'!"

And she marched away in triumph.

The others dispersed, their animosity against the sheriff allayed.

As for him, he was already fast asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

OUT OF A DELICATE SITUATION.

DISAPPOINTED in his quest of Tiger Dick, Ad Farley returned home to Coyote, to fall into a mistaken suspicion of the Golden Serpent, as we have seen.

Crack! crack! crack! crack! crack!—the six shots followed one another without break, covering such a space on the closet door that it seemed impossible for a man to stand behind it and escape with life.

But by squeezing his body into as small a compass as its rotundity would permit, in one end of the pantry, Joel Brinton came off with only a flesh wound or two, painful, but not dangerous.

"Now is my only chance!" he reflected, in the pause which followed the shots.

And bursting open the closet door, he leaped out into the room, with leveled revolver.

His assailant already had his hand on the butt of a second revolver.

Beside him stood the lady of tigerish assions and treachery, now the picture of stony terror.

Even in that moment of deadly peril Joel Brinton was struck by her fierce beauty.

About her neck glittered the golden device from which she evidently took her name, and her sloe-black eyes, though large and beautiful, scintillated like those of a snake.

Cheeks and lips were bloodless, and pallor made her skin look yellow; but with that full round nether lip a vivid red, and the soft bloom of warm southern life glowing in those olive cheeks, he could imagine her wonderful Oriental loveliness. It was in keeping with the voice that had witched him.

Into the other room, seen through the parted curtains, a lot of men from the gambling saloon were rushing.

Joel Brinton covered the heart of his assailant with his revolver, and said, with the coolness that always came to him in a moment of deadliest peril:

"Gently, my dear sir! You will have the good sense not to draw that weapon. I shall be compelled to kill you, if you deny me the opportunity to vindicate myself."

Ad Farley made no reply. He only kept his basilisk eyes fixed on the speaker, while he repeated over and over again to himself:

"I'll cut his heart out of his body, curse him!"

But even in that moment of blind fury he knew that it would not further his revenge to throw away his life. He bided his time!

Concisely Joel Brinton explained his presence in so equivocal a position, concluding:

"The lady will doubtless tell you why she sought the interview. It remains for me only to assure you that it has been entirely relative to Black-Hoss Ben."

He then waited for such further exculpation as the lady herself might volunteer.

Adam Farley turned toward her with a smile that vividly suggested the drawing of the quivering lip back from the fangs of a wolf.

"Well, madam?" he said.

Meanwhile the Golden Serpent had had time to recover her courage and summon her resources.

"What I have to say to you shall be in private," she replied.

Then looking boldly at the gaping crowd that had intruded into her apartments, she went on:

"Gentlemen, if you will excuse me for the present, the game will begin at the usual hour to-night."

Their jaws dropped. They stared at her, at Adam Farley, and then at one another.

Could it be possible that a woman in her posi-

tion was so confident of satisfying a man like Adam Farley?

But she bowed to them with her accustomed grace, so pointedly that it was impossible not to accept their dismissal.

Pocketing their curiosity as best they could, they awkwardly backed out.

"Fur cheek, ye understand," muttered one to his fellows, "commend me to that thar leetle Greaser."

"Why, dang her leetle skin!" cried another, "thar never was a deader open-an'-shut ag'in nobody; an' she says: 'Excuse me, gents, it's a misdeal!'"

The amazement on the face of the speaker at this example of cool impudence set the others to laughing; and they forthwith fell to laying bets whether or not she would succeed in "putting Ad Farley's head back into the sack."

The Golden Serpent had meanwhile addressed herself to Joel Brinton in the third person.

"This gentleman," she said, "is conscious of his own rectitude, so he will not require to be present at my vindication of myself."

And she bowed a distant *conge* to the knight of the thatchless poll.

While she spoke he fell to batting his eyes and wriggling his nose, his face distorted in a grimace of rage.

The climax came close upon the conclusion of her polite speech, and his reply was a ringing:

"Atchew! atchew! atchew!"

Each explosion was accompanied by an involuntary bow, far more vigorous than graceful.

Even in that critical situation the lady could not repress a smile.

The sufferer, inwardly execrating the savage who had deprived him of his wig and the villain who had employed him, said:

"Pardod be, if I request you to ha'd be by handkerchief. I deed dot assure you that I would dot perbit a lady do be such service under less ebbarrassi'g circubstances."

Of course his auditors understood that he referred thus delicately to the necessity of keeping a wary eye on Ad Farley's movements.

That gentleman had stood with every muscle tense, his shoulders rising and falling with every respiration, his eyes glowing like coals of fire.

"They cannot escape me!" he kept assuring himself. "I will take my time to study up a revenge such as the world has never heard of."

It did not seem to occur to him that work was accumulating on his hands—first Tiger Dick, and now the Golden Serpent—a host in herself, if he ever woke her up—and imperturbable Joel Brinton.

The lady gracefully restored handkerchief and hat.

"Thagks! thagks!"

And Joel Brinton covered his vigilance on his host under the mask of politeness, by bowing himself out backward.

If he had known any way out other than through the gambling-saloon, he would have taken it.

When he presented himself, the crowd stared at him with wonderful grins.

"Waal, boss," said one, "you take the cake, you do!—you an' that thar leetle doxologer! Haw! haw! haw!"

"As they gits old they gits wicked!" said another sententiously.

There was no use in attempting to debate the matter with such men as these.

Joel Brinton adopted the easiest way gracefully out of it.

"Gedtlebed," he said, "there is wud logic you all uddersta'd."

And he put a five-dollar gold-piece on the bar and bowed himself out.

"Waal, I sw'ar! he ain't a bad sort!" cried an old rummy, beginning to smack his tremulous lips. "That thar takes in the lot of us, boys! Blow me tight if I've wet my whistle from the ground up these six months. I reckon, now, a count o' noses ought to give me two squar' drinks out o' that thar."

And he proceeded to count how many were to share in the "all-hands-round."

"Hold on, pard!" cried another, seeking to detain their entertainer. "You'd orter crook yer elbow along of us, fur luck an' better acquaintance."

"Excuse be, gedtlebed," pleaded Mr. Brinton.

"The gent's in a hurry to see a friend!" said some one, and a general uproarious guffaw followed Joel Brinton into the street.

Once more in the open air, he breathed more freely.

"Under ordinary circumstances," he reflected, "I would not leave a woman to the tender mercies of that blood-thirsty brute. What a complication of affairs! I have added another enemy—if not two—to my list, and learned nothing of the first."

Then the old bachelor's cynicism led him to add, with a long-drawn sigh:

"A-a-a-ah! woman! woman! What a peaceful world this would be if there weren't any of them to keep us in hot water! But then, I suppose it would become monotonous, after a while."

"But I wonder, now, why she received me in that crazy fashion."

Passing by his speculations, let us listen to the lady's elucidation of her own motives.

Ad Farley awaited it grimly.

"My *Adan*," said the Spanish woman, now thorough mistress of herself, "our love, of late, is getting to be a series of skirmishes, with intervals of armed truce."

"To the point, madam."

"Come! come!" she said, lightly; "I am no longer afraid of your jealousy. The last five minutes have shown it to me in a new light. I assure you that it thrills me with an exquisite sense of pleasure to have you look at me as you are doing just now—as if you longed to trample me under foot, and annihilate me with one furious stamp!"

"Have a care!" he cried, through his set teeth, his nostrils quivering and his eyes ablaze.

She put her hands palm to palm, drew her shoulders forward, and looked up at him with the coaxing smile of a child.

It was hard to look at the innocent expression on her face and believe that it was only dissimulation.

Was there nothing in it, after all and had he only been making a fool of himself?

The doubt, growing in spite of his resolve, and the thrill of pleasure that it brought with it, angered him.

"Do you fancy that you can wheedle me like this?" he cried fiercely.

"I have a mind to say nothing and leave you to come to your senses as you best can," she replied.

Then, as if yielding to a sudden impulse:

"That you should fear a rival in a young man—well, there might be some sense in that. But this funny old fellow without a sprig of hair on his head! Ha! ha! ha! That is too ridiculous!"

And she went off in a ripple of laughter that was like liquid music.

The stern set of the man's iron features relaxed in spite of him, as he looked at her. It was not easy to believe evil of a thing so beautiful.

Above all, he loved her, in his stormy—and selfish—way.

"Wasn't he a funny old—What do you call it in your barbarous English? Dahdee, eh?"

She meant "daddy," and the pretty foreign accent added to the comicality of the thing.

Ad Farley recalled the appearance of the figure that had come from the pantry, and began to smile.

With a scream of merry triumph the Golden Serpent sprung upon him and clasped her arms about his neck.

"There, now!" she said, letting her head hang back as she looked up into his face, "don't it make you feel better to be good, instead of being cross with me?"

He took her face between his hands, and gazed steadily into her bright eyes.

"You haven't explained yet," he said, not harshly.

She drew him to the divan, made him sit down, and took up her post on his knee.

"Now, if you'll be good," she said, pulling at his whiskers, "I'll tell you all about it. Where shall I begin?"

"At the beginning."

"But first, you will never be cross with me again—and you will always wait until I can show you that there is no reason for you to lose your head?"

"Yes, I promise," he said, quite docilely.

"Well, then, as he told you, he had never heard of me, and probably never would, but that I sent for him."

"Why did you do that?"

"He was making inquiry for Black-Hoss Ben, and I thought it would be best for us to know what he wanted of him. But he refused to state it to the men; so I tried what a woman could do."

"Now, in managing you great fellows, there are two or three things on which we women can always count. In the first place, you always lose your heads when you lose your hearts. Then, it is enough only to withhold anything from you to make you want it at once, no matter how insignificant it may be. Further, you imagine that a woman must be as beautiful as a houri, if she but hides from you. You can see this at any masked fandango. Lastly, those bald-headed old wretches are the worst of all!"

"There you have the key to the whole situation. I pumped him dry, and told him nothing. I was on the point of getting rid of him when you came upon us. Then I remembered the senseless jealousy of this villainous Tiger Dick with which you had left me, and became terrified at the thought of your finding me with another man so soon. Of course I did the most indiscreet thing imaginable. But, *Adan*—my *Adan*, I love you so; and it seemed as if I were pursued by a deadly fatality destined to destroy everything. Ah, *Adan*!"

Her voice died away in a tender, caressing murmur. She nestled her head on his shoulder, and looked at him through half-closed eyes, her lips slightly parted, inviting the seal of restored confidence—oneness.

The man surrendered at discretion, whispering:

"Pipa! Pipa!"

In her heart she was saying:

"Ah, God! how I hate this stupid calf! For one moment, while he poured his shot into the closet door, I almost loved him. Why does he not see through my thin fraud, and trample me under his feet in godlike scorn? Then I should worship him! But, no! I have but to shed a tear, or look at him tenderly, and he swallows the bait like the gudgeon that he is!"

Nothing of this appeared in the seeming delicious languor with which she received the man's passionate kisses.

"I will win him to my use," she said to herself, "and then I will strike my fangs into his heart! Ah! it is not for nothing that I have been called the Golden Serpent!"

When the transports of the lover were at their height, she said to him:

"My *Adan*, I want you to strike a blow for me."

"You have but to mention it."

"This man must never see Black-Hoss Ben. More than that, he must not be left on the face of the earth. Kill him!"

"I thought he was a stranger to you."

"If it were only he, I would not care. But this girl whom he is seeking to rescue—her I hate with a deadly hatred! Ah, *Dios!* to think that she is in the power of one whom she loathes! That is ecstasy to me! I ask no better revenge than that she stay as she is! Kill him that he may not rescue her, that he may not send Tiger Dick to her aid!"

"I will!" said Ad Farley, with a strange light in his eyes.

To himself he was saying:

"When they are all swept from my path—all! all! curse them!—then I shall feel sure of her!"

Meanwhile, out in the night, Joel Brinton was confronted by a dusky figure which started out from the deep shadow as he passed the corner of a shanty.

Fearing that he had been waylaid, he leaped aside and drew a weapon.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he demanded, the cool night air having "raised the blockade" in his nasal passage, so that he could once more articulate distinctly.

CHAPTER XIII.

"ABOUT FACE! GIT!"

"PARD," responded the shadowy figure, "you're wantin' Black-Hoss Ben?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I'm the galoot to give ye a p'inter."

"Ah! Then you're just the man I want to see."

"Of course I am!"

"Come out into the light, and let me look you over."

"That's fa'r, as between man an' man. Pard, I don't ax ye to take me on trust. He! he! it's a long time sense I've took anythin' on trust myself! Nowadays Johnny's took down the slate! But the day hes been when I sized up better'n what ye see me now."

The speaker preceded Joel Brinton until he stood in the bar of light streaming from a saloon window.

"Well, you ain't anything to speak of, and that's a fact!" said his inquisitor, frankly.

The judgment was a fair one. The man was the most dilapidated specimen of rag-tag and bobtail humanity that Joel Brinton had yet come across.

"Boss," said the man, with an odd kind of depreciation, "I ain't proud!"

"Well, what have you to tell me about Black-Hoss Ben?"

"H'm! Come in an' take somethin', an' we kin talk more comfortably," said the fellow, with cool impudence.

And he threw open the door of the saloon before which they had stopped, with off-hand hospitality.

Joel Brinton took the hint, walked in, and ordered the drinks.

The vagabond crossed his legs and sipped his liquor as if to make the most of it.

"Ef you'd called on me five year ago, to my country-seat on the Hudson," he said, "I'd a' gi'n ye somethin' to hold over this hyar, you bet! But these hyar galoots what hangs out in the minin' deestrict's—bless ye! they don't know licker as is licker from ackifortis! So whar's the use o' throwin' away gullet-greese as 'ud fetch a sawbuck on hogs. *That's* what I says! This hyar's good 'nough fur 'em—good 'nough fur 'em, by thunder! Now, I knowed a gent—"

"Excuse me! but we seem to be losing sight of Black-Hoss Ben," said Joel Brinton, seeing that the fellow had settled himself for an interminable story, during the course of which his glass would solicit replenishing an indefinite number of times.

"I was jest comin' to that, boss," he said, with an injured air.

"All right! Drive ahead!"

"Ye're wantin' to find Ben purty bad, I reckon?"—warily.

"Of course I want to find him!" with some impatience.

"I allow the boys wa'n't a-givin' it away muchly?"

"I wouldn't be wasting time on you if they had!"

"Boss, as between man an' man, it ought to be wo'th a leetle somethin'—"

"In other words, you refuse to speak until I get you gloriously drunk?"

"Don't say drunk, pard!—don't say drunk! Sociable! sociable!"

"Sociable, then."

"That's better. I always was a sociable cuss. I takes my—"

"Look here, friend! I don't propose to stay here all night to fill you up. How much do you hold? I'll leave you enough to put you in pickle; and you can tell me what you know, and let me go."

"Pard," said the old bummer, his face broadening into a grin, and his eyes glistening with greedy anticipation, "ef I was only a *camel*, now, so's I'd hold enough to last me a week or so, I wouldn't ask nothin' better'n to be filled up on't, chockful, ye understand! I'd button up my lip an' hold my nose, an' pile 'er in tell my eyes was swimmin' in liquid delight, an' it run out o' my ears. Oh, Lord! wouldn't I have one grand bile!"

"Do you expect me to keep you drunk for a week?"

"Pard, I don't ax ye to stay by me."

"What then?"

The bummer stood up, thrust his hands into his trowsers pockets, and drew them inside out, regarding his entertainer pathetically.

"Boss," he said, with a melancholy shake of the head, "I hope ye'll never know how this hyar feels!"

Joel Brinton could not repress a smile.

"You shrewd rascal," he exclaimed. "What do you demand for your information?"

"I'm leavin' that thar to your generosity, knowin' ye to be a gentleman. Before I was in reduced sarcumstances, when I had my country seat on the Hudson, ye understand—"

"Exactly! Very well, I will pay you according to what you have to tell."

"Boss, I wish it was more."

"Never mind your apologies. Go ahead."

"Waal, boss, ef so be you'll go to Mulligan's Bend, you'll find thar a sheriff—one Jim Farnsworth—what's a-lookin' fur the same bird that you be."

"Well?"

"Waal?"

"Does the sheriff know where Black-Hoss Ben is?"

"I allow mostly not."

"Then what good can it do me to know where the sheriff is? Come! come! we're not gettin' on."

"Ef so be you two gents would put your heads together."

"With nothing in either of them? Add nothing to nothing, and nothing remains."

"But, pard, two such bowers as you be ought to call purty loud for trumps. You kin see the Tiger, an' go him one better."

"The Tiger!" exclaimed Joel Brinton, catching at the name.

"Eh?" ejaculated the bummer, quick to see, by the other's manner, that he had unearthed something new.

"Why did you say 'the Tiger'?"

"That thar's Black-Hoss Ben's other handle, ye understand—Tiger Dick."

"Is he such a terrible fellow, then?"

"Boss, he's a bad man to buck."

"I don't think I follow you."

"He slings a wicked hand at faro. He useter claw the boys tell they howled."

"Oh! A gambler?"

"Don't mention it. Gilt-edged!"

Joel Brinton's brows contracted.

"So this is the man who has such power over Beatrice," he reflected. "A professional gambler."

That affected him even more than the charge of murder hanging over Black-Hoss Ben. He knew that in that wild life a man of generally good intentions may be surprised into taking the life of another; but a gambler was one deliberately gone wrong.

"If I can do without him," he reflected, "I will not be the means of bringing them together again. I will see what can be done with this sheriff."

"Paying the bummer for his information, he went again out into the night.

"I don't half like my adventure with that little Spaniard," he mused. "She would betray me to shield herself without a qualm, and that fellow of hers would 'rub me out' for a song. The sooner I shake the dust of this place off my shoes, the better my chance of eventually dying in my bed."

He secured the services of a man to act as guide, and set out for Mulligan's Bend at once.

Arriving safely, he concluded to take the measure of the sheriff before declaring himself.

It therefore happened that he was of the number roused by the uproar following Jim Farnsworth's intrusion into Mrs. O'Driscoll's apartment, and witnessed Tiger Dick's challenge and the cool manner in which it was received.

"There is going to be a desperate fight be-

tween those men," he reflected, "and it will be hopeless to try to divert the sheriff to my business. If I take him into my confidence, he will use Beatrice as a decoy to lure his game. I don't love Tiger Dick, but I should hate to serve him such a trick."

"Here's this other fellow—this blow-hard. There's more in him, I fancy, than appears on the surface. If he is really in with Tiger Dick, I may be able to get access to his principal through him. I'll try it."

In the morning he "turned out" bright and early, and waited for the appearance of the "Bloomin' Blizzard from Bloody Run."

Unknown to him, there was another on the lookout for the braggart.

Jim Farnsworth had said to himself:

"That fellow *may* be in with the Tiger; he may be only a meddlesome fellow who likes to have his oar in everything. At any rate, he's worth a little watching."

But between darkness and daylight Jim Farnsworth underwent a metamorphosis. His most intimate friend would not have recognized him in the red-shirted miner who lounged about the camp, apparently with nothing to do but wait for something to turn up.

The Blizzard seemed to be equally aimless in his wanderings into and out of the various saloons; and, on the watch for an opportunity to approach him without attracting attention, it taxed Jo Brinton's ingenuity to keep track of him without betraying the fact that he was shadowing him.

He thought that he succeeded; but the fact was that Jim Farnsworth "spotted" him almost immediately.

"Eh! what's this?" he queried. "That old fellow is on the trail of my game. It may pay to pipe them both. What does he want with the Blizzard, I wonder? I will give him a chance to tell me."

But Jim's way of giving him a chance was a peculiar one. He waited for the two to come together.

While he waited, a man in the rough dress of the region, and with his face hidden by an unkempt beard, approached and stood, apparently deliberating with drunken solemnity whether to go up the street or down.

"Eh, Joe?" asked the sheriff, guardedly.

"Do you see that old duffer with a handkerchief about his head in the place of a wig?" asked the other, from the midst of his beard, no movement of his whiskers betraying the fact that he was speaking.

"Yes. Who is he?"

"He's on the lookout for Tiger Dick, for some purpose."

"Ah!"

"I managed to send him to you."

"He seems to have concluded that his chances were better by following that burly fellow yonder. Do you suppose he's in with Dick?"

"No. He's as square as a die;—a tenderfoot and a gentleman."

"What's he after, then?"

"Give it up."

"All right. I'll find out."

The detective who had so imposed upon Joel Brinton the night before now made up his mind to go up the street instead of down, and reeled off.

The Blizzard finally left the camp, with Joel Brinton on his trail, and Jim Farnsworth after him.

Just outside the camp an angle in the road took the Blizzard out of Joel Brinton's sight. He hurried forward to overtake him.

He came upon him more abruptly than he expected, and found himself looking down the bore of a revolver.

"Waal, stranger," said the Blizzard, who was at the other end of the "barker," "what ye been doggin' me all the mornin' fur, hey?"

"So you have seen through me from the first?" said Joel Brinton, pleasantly. "I was flattering myself that I was a better detective."

"That's all right," said the other, sullenly.

"But show up!"

"Where can I find Tiger Dick?" asked Joel Brinton, abruptly, watching the man's face for some change of expression to tell him whether he was on the right track or not.

"Tiger Dick?" asked the other, with a look of surprise.

"Tiger Dick," repeated Joel Brinton, disappointed at his apparent want of knowledge, yet not giving up all at once.

"Waal, boss," said the other, "I reckon ef it's Tiger Dick ye're wantin', ye've come to the wrong shop. I doan' know him from a side o' sole-leather."

"Come! come! that's all right. I'm not in the pay of the sheriff. I want to get a word or two with Tiger Dick; and after that I shall bid him good-bye. If you are afraid to trust me, say to the Tiger that I wish to see him, and will respond to his appointment. Only it's very important. My business ought not to wait an hour longer than is absolutely unavoidable."

"Boss, I might take yer money an' keep ye waitin' fur word that 'u'd never come. But I told ye straight when I said that I didn't know Tiger Dick."

"Why did you have that little brush with the sheriff last night?"

"Oh! him? Waal, ye see, he's too fresh, he is. I like to take a galoot down a peg or two when I find he knows too much."

All this was said with apparent frankness.

Joel Brinton was convinced that he had made a mistake—that the fellow was what he pretended to be.

Jim Farnsworth, on the other hand, was satisfied of just the reverse.

Joel Brinton turned back into the camp.

Jim Farnsworth followed on after the Blizzard.

The latter walked on as if unsuspicious of being shadowed, as if at peace with all the world, and satisfied with himself.

He shied stones out over the precipices, and waited to hear them clatter on the rocks below. He whistled snatches of rude border songs, once in a while stopping to put in a few jig-steps. He paused to watch the antics of chipmunks, whistling to fetch them up on their haunches, and laughing with the glee of a school-boy.

"That's a care-free sort of fellow for an outlaw plotting mischief," said the sheriff. "I wonder if I can be barking up the wrong tree, after all?"

The Blizzard passed out of sight round a bend in the way.

When Farnsworth came up to that point, he could not see him on ahead; but almost directly at his feet he discovered what arrested his attention.

It was a little stick stuck in the ground, with a piece of writing-paper inserted in a slit in the top.

The sheriff had but to stoop to pick it up. On it was traced:

"About face! Git!"

As the sheriff stood erect, he heard the sharp crack of a pistol or rifle-shot, and the zip of a bullet close to his head.

CHAPTER XIV.

SPREADING THE SNARE.

It required a nerve of iron not to leap to cover.

However, the sheriff had reasoned out the situation in a flash.

"If that shot had meant business, I should not have received this warning," indicating the paper.

And he coolly turned and walked back over the road he had come.

"Tiger Dick has sharp spies on me already. The question is, is this bullying fellow one of them? Then, who is this tenderfoot, and what does he want with the Tiger?"

Returning to Mulligan's Bend, he slipped into the tavern, resumed his ordinary dress, and reappearing on the street, put himself in Joel Brinton's way without seeming intention.

"I beg your pardon, sir! Is not this Sheriff Farnsworth?"

Jim turned his sharp glance upon the speaker.

"That is my name," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I am Joel Brinton, of New York. Can you grant me an interview?"

"I am at your service, sir, for a limited time."

"I will not detain you long. Where can we secure privacy?"

"Here in the open street, where we can see that no one comes within earshot. Go ahead, sir!"

Joel Brinton stated his case, with the single reservation of Beatrice's predilection for Black-Hoss Ben.

"Now, sir," he concluded, "can you assist me to get access to Tiger Dick with the least possible delay?"

"You expect the Tiger to aid you in the recovery of the lady?—or only to tell you who her enemy is, and how to meet him?"

"If his help would make her rescue more certain, I could not refuse to accept it."

"H'm! Your words seem to imply that you would prefer to dispense with his services, if possible. Why?"

Joel Brinton flushed with embarrassment, and hesitated.

"I do not demand your confidence," the sheriff quickly interposed.

"Suffice it to say that I do not care to bring the outlaw and the lady together again."

"But if the fellow could be effectually disposed of?"

"I am aware that you are in quest of him, and why. I should be reluctant to use my appeal to him as a snare to lure him into your power."

"That is the reason you first sought the Blizzard?"

"You know that I have done so?"

"By following you. Now, my dear sir, while such sentiments do credit to your heart, you must see that they stand in the way of the accomplishment of your purpose. Here is everything at your hand. We draw the Tiger into our net; learn from him what you wish; in return for your assistance in getting my prisoner, I guarantee to make as good use of the knowledge as he would; and, the lady restored, I take

him out of the way. What could work more perfectly than that?"

" Practically, nothing. Yet I confess that nothing short of a terrible interest at stake would induce me to go into such a partnership."

" It is agreed, then?"

" Yes."

" It only remains for us to let Tiger Dick know that he is wanted, and for what."

" How can we do that?"

" By advertisement."

Joel Brinton looked his surprise.

" By poster," explained the sheriff. " I have reason to believe that the Tiger has means of knowing what goes on in this camp, by secret emissaries. Depend upon it, you will hear from him, if he concludes to meet you."

" Let us proceed at once, then."

" The only thing indispensable is to give him every opportunity to see you, apparently without risk."

" What shall I do?"

" Ramble about in the vicinity of the camp. Meanwhile, if I had anticipated such an association as this, I should not have seen you so openly. I shall have to cover my tracks by seeming to leave the place. But when you least expect me I may turn up. Go ahead as if you were operating alone."

They then separated; and half an hour later the sheriff rode out of the camp in the direction of Coyote.

Only a few minutes behind him a man left Mulligan's Bend, going out among the crags on foot. Once out of sight, he became all animation; and having found a horse tethered in a secret place, he rode at break-neck pace along mountain paths that seemed accessible only to goats.

He entered Coyote nearly half an hour before a rider accompanied by the four men who had attended Jim Farnsworth the day before in company with Adam Farley.

The leader of this little party dismounted before the principal hotel, called for a room, and locked himself in, as if for a nap; while his subordinates lounged about idly.

The rider who had outflanked them on the road to Coyote exchanged a hasty word with another whom he found hanging about as if he had nothing to do.

" Pass the word that he is under lock and key here," he said. " I will stay by him, and give warning if he moves."

The man to whom this message was given left Coyote, and his fellow spy returned to keep watch over Jim Farnsworth—as he supposed!

But on the road between Mulligan's Bend and Coyote a wonderful metamorphosis had taken place.

Jim Farnsworth and his men had been joined by a man who, by a few clever touches in the way of disguise, became the sheriff's counterpart.

This man it was who rode into Coyote at the head of the sheriff's posse, and now rested quietly under espionage; while the Frisco sheriff himself returned to the Bend in an altogether new character.

Meanwhile Joel Brinton had posted his call upon Tiger Dick, and was giving him every opportunity to see him outside the camp.

The movements of the Blizzard subsequent to his meeting with Joel Brinton proved that Jim Farnsworth's suspicions were well founded.

Out among the crags a man was pacing restlessly to and fro, communing with himself in gloomy meditation.

Close at hand, without tether or halter, grazed the wonderful black stallion which was celebrated through all that section of the country.

" Robbed of the one thing that I have ever really longed for; hunted like a wild beast; with nothing behind but bitter memories, and nothing before but this dull heartache, this growing hatred of everything under heaven—why not end it all? What is life?—mere endurance of pain and aimless struggle, with no peace save in sleep—that we should cling to it? Click! click! and the thing is done. There need not be a single pang. I pass into oblivion without so much as a conscious shock. And yet—and yet!"

He continued his restless pacing, his lips becoming more rigid, his frown deeper.

" I'll down Jim Farnsworth first!" he said, presently. " No man shall ever say that Tiger Dick was run to death by even so good a man as he. But I can take no more blood on my hands—not now! not now!"

Once more he strode on in grim silence; but presently he whispered:

" Beatrice!"

Then again he said:

" No more blood! No, no! No more blood!"

His reverie was broken in upon by a shrill whistle.

A response was heard like an echo.

Tiger Dick looked up and waited expectantly. Presently footsteps were audible—the crackle of breaking twigs and the swish of disturbed foliage, and the Blizzard stepped into view.

" Well?" asked the Tiger.

" Cap, the thing's been posted."

" With what effect?"

" He don't cry small yit."

" Why have you been so long detained?"

" Waal, boss, I got two of 'em after me."

" Two?"

" The sheriff an' another one."

" Another one? One of his crowd?"

" No, I allow not."

" Who, then?"

" That I don't rightly know. It was an old party, with a handkerchief tied around his head in place of a wig."

" What?" cried the Tiger, starting sharply.

" Describe the man."

The Blizzard did so.

" My God!" breathed Tiger Dick, beginning to tremble visibly. " Was he alone? What did he want?"

" He was alone as fur as I see. He wanted to see you pertickler. Of course I didn't give myself away. I swore I didn't know you from a side o' sole-leather."

" But did he seem put out? Was he anxious to see me?"

" Waal, boss, he was, some."

Tiger Dick began to pace restlessly back and forth.

" Suppose she has relented!" he muttered to himself. " It may have cost her more than she thought! My God! my God!"

The perspiration had started from every pore. He was wringing his hands excitedly. Great waves of delight and tenderness followed one another through his frame.

" Beatrice! Beatrice! If it can be true!" he cried, inwardly. " She shall never know a moment's sorrow! I will pour my soul over and about her in a warm flood of constant love. Beatrice! My darling! Oh, God! if she can have relented! Why else would he be seeking me? But, there! it may not be the man at all!"

He had the Blizzard describe the unknown and every circumstance connected with him, putting him through a catechism which drew out every detail.

" It is he!" he cried in his quivering heart. " And I will see him, if a thousand sheriffs stand in the way!"

" Tom," he said, " I'm going into Mulligan's Bend."

" Eh, Cap! You'll never come out of it ag'in, only with the bracelets on, or feet fu'st!"

" I shall go, no matter how I come back!"

" Boss, we can't scare up half a dozen o' the boys to save our lives."

" I shall go alone."

" Good-by, then! He'll gobble you, sure!"

" Of course I shall go in disguise. I do not care to provoke a meeting with him, if it can be avoided."

" Cap, why don't you say the word? Click-clack! and over he goes! It's as easy as rollin' off a log."

" I say no! I'm done with blood. From this day forth I will never do a thing that is not as square as a die!"

He spoke with a buoyant elation which expanded his breast and made his face glow. It was a pledge to the woman he loved!

The Blizzard rolled his quid into the other cheek, and laughed.

" Ye propose ter run yerself like a moral show," he said, " with nothin' to offend the most fastidious taste. Waal, I've been on that lay myself, before now. But I found that it was up-hill work; an' besides, it didn't pay."

" I say, Cap."

" Well?"

" Ye may take me fur a fool, but I've seen a thing ur two in my time. This hyar ain't the country fur moral reform—ye hyear me? Do ye know how this thing is goin' to pan out? You may be all right; but they won't let ye! They'll make ye strike out, jest to keep yer head above water."

" We'll see about that!" said Tiger Dick, confidently.

To himself he was saying:

" We'll not lose a day in this accursed country. I'll take her to Europe; and there, with the whole world between us and all bitter memories, surely the past may be forgotten."

Half an hour later an encouraging bit of intelligence was brought him.

" Cap, the sheriff an' his crowd has took the back track fur Coyote."

" It is a good omen!" he cried. " See! I have but to make a good resolve, and the way is cleared."

" Don't go it reckless, Cap," cautioned the Blizzard. " When the devil deals ye both bowers an' the ace, ye may bet he's got the joker, an' his calcalatin' to eucher ye on suit."

Still later came word that the sheriff was "bunking" at Coyote, closely shadowed.

" What do you want better than that?" asked the Tiger.

The Blizzard shook his head.

" It's too good to keep," he said. " I've rode the trick mule in my day; an' he's wickedest when his eyes is shut."

The Tiger laughed gleefully.

" It's a turn in my luck," he said. " I'm on a new lay, boys; and it's raining ducats!"

And with that superstitious faith in destiny which is common to great gamblers and great soldiers, and which lurks in all our minds more or less covertly, he took his way toward—

What? Would he come back a free man?—or would the Blizzard's doubting prognostic meet with a fatal fulfillment?

CHAPTER XV.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

" I SAY, stranger! kin you p'int me the way to Mulligan's Bend?"

Joel Brinton looked up and saw a prospector, evidently, of the most dilapidated type, with a scanty camp-kit slung over his shoulder to a worn pick and shovel. He was as unkempt as ragged, his frowsy hair and beard looking as if they had never made the acquaintance of comb or scissors. But his revolvers were in perfect order.

A prey to anxiety, increased by every passing moment of delay, Joel Brinton answered the tramp carelessly:

" Keep on down the road. You can't miss it."

" It ain't much furder, is it, now? I'm dead beat, an' that's a fact."

And the speaker wearily dropped his kit on the ground, gave a hitch to his trowsers, and produced a little black pipe from the band of his hat.

" It is under a mile," said Mr. Brinton.

" That's a mile furder'n I wisht it was. Boss, have you got a match anywhar about yer clo's?"

Joel Brinton had a match, and tendered it.

" Thankee!" said the recipient.

Then glancing into the bowl of his pipe, which seemed to have been about half-smoked, and then allowed to go out, he ventured:

" Ye mought have a mite o' terbacky, now, pard?"

" I have nothing but a cigar, to which you are welcome," said Joel Brinton, who knew what a smoke was to a man who wanted it bad.

" Eh? What? Boss, ye don't mean to give me that? Waal, I sw'ar! Hyuh! hyuh! hyuh! hyuh! That thar's a beauty, that is; an' you're a trump, boss—you air fur a fact! If ever I git the chance to return the compliment, you bet I won't furgit this hyar—never!"

The miner received the cigar and began to smoke it with a gusto that seemed to indicate that the chances of such an indulgence were few and far between with him.

" Boss," he said, with a sudden lowering of his voice, " air we alone?"

Joel Brinton started. For the first time he noticed how piercing were the glances of the tattered demalion.

At once flashed through his mind the conviction that this man was in disguise.

" It is another of Black-Hoss Ben's spies!" he said to himself.

" Alone?" he repeated, trying to preserve his countenance. " Don't you see that we are?"

He let his hand drop significantly on the butt of his revolver as he spoke.

The miner laughed.

" Wrong thar, pard," he said. " I reckon I look purty rough; but one word will tell you that I'm straight."

" What word?"

" Tiger!"

" Tiger Dick?"

" Exactly."

" What do you know of him?"

Joel Brinton was now trembling with excitement. He not only saw the accomplishment of his mission; but he was speculating as to whether Jim Farnsworth would be in readiness to pounce upon Dick when he saw him. Already he began to regret his treacherous partnership.

The man before him smoked away, perfectly self-possessed.

" Suppose I was his leutenant, boss?" he said, coolly.

" Has he sent you to act for him?"

" Waal, that depends. What's your business with him?"

" It is of such a nature that I can communicate it only to him in person."

The miner dropped his cigar, and with a muttered ejaculation bent forward to pick it up. His hand trembled.

" Is it yer own business, ur—ur—"

His voice, suddenly grown husky, died completely out; and he gazed at Joel Brinton in a way that thrilled him strangely.

" It more particularly concerns another, of whom I am not at liberty to speak to a go-between. Say to Black-Hoss Ben that it is imperative. Impress that fact upon him. Tell him, for God's sake, not to lose time in parleying. I must see him—"

" At once! You do see him, now!"

Joel Brinton had become so earnest that Tiger Dick threw off all dissimulation.

" What is it, sir?" he cried. " Has anything happened to—to—"

" It is you?" cried Joel Brinton, eagerly.

" Of course it is I!"

And the Tiger half removed the false beard from his face.

" You recognize me?"

" Thank God!"

" And now, what is it? Speak quickly!"

" She is gone!"

stunning blow. He caught at a tree for support, and put his hand to his head.

"Gone! gone!" he gasped. "Dead?—without a word? What did she say? Oh, surely, something!—something!"

And catching the hand of the other, he clung to it as if for life.

"You misunderstand me, or are deceiving me," said Joel Brinton. "She is not dead, but has disappeared. I have reason to believe that she has been abducted. Tell me on the honor of a man, was it your work?"

"My work! I who would have put my heart under her feet rather than cause her an instant's pain! But come! this is no time for suspicions. We are losing time. You say that she has disappeared. When?—how? Tell me everything."

Joel Brinton did as requested, concluding with Beatrice's injunction to seek out Black-Hoss Ben if the danger she feared came upon her.

Tiger Dick was overjoyed by this evidence of her dependence upon him.

"She said that? She told you to come to me—me?" he cried, losing all precaution, and speaking in clear, ringing tones. "How did she look when she spoke of me? Has she been pained? Did she regret—"

But in the mad elation of the moment he did not wait for answers to his questions.

"She loves me!" he cried to himself. "Oh, God! why did I not press her to a confession? I should have taken her even against her apparent will. She would have forgiven me. She loves me! she loves me! All is said in that. And I—fool! fool!—I let her escape!"

A storm of wild passion swept over him.

"There is but one devil who could have done such a thing!" he cried. "It is his second blow at me! Now hear me swear that I will crush him, like the viper he is! I let him go when his blow was at me only. I half felt that he was doing her a service. But now—now that he has turned his hand against her, I will grind him to atoms!"

"Who is this enemy?" asked Joel Brinton, breathlessly.

"Yellow Jack, he is called—the foul spawn of his fiend of a father, Demon Dukes!"

"Her cousin!"

"Do not so malign her. When heaven and hell are one, then there may be some relationship between them, but not before. But we are wasting time in idle words. Have you any men at your command? We shall need them."

"If money will secure them—"

"It will secure anything but shattered happiness."

There was almost a sob in Tiger Dick's voice. He was thinking that all might be over for this world with the woman he loved more than his own life.

Joel Brinton had forgotten his hostility to the man before him. He had forgotten his league with Jim Farnsworth against him. He saw the true man in his deep devotion to Beatrice. He was at once inspired with confidence in his power as well.

"Come!" said Tiger Dick.

"Stay!" said a voice just behind him.

He saw Joel Brinton's startled look. He turned round, to find himself gazing down the bore of a revolver.

"Dick," said a familiar voice, "I'm heartily glad to see you."

Tiger Dick stood like a man turned to stone.

He did not utter a sound, nor did a muscle of his face move. He only gazed down the bore of that revolver, a slow, gray pallor of despair overspreading his countenance.

"At this moment, of all others in my life!" he was saying to himself. "Just when she is calling to me!"

"I'm sorry for you, Dick," said the sheriff, good-naturedly. "But you know that business is business."

"Farnsworth," said the Tiger, "you know me."

"Only too well, Dick!"

"At any rate, you know that I am a man of my word?"

"'M!—ordinarily, yes."

"Very well! I pledge you my word as a gentleman, that, if you will give me a few days of freedom—say a week at the outside—I will return and place myself unreservedly in your power."

"A bird in the hand, Dick. Something might happen, you know."

"Do you mean to say that you do not trust me?"

"Some men might think that an unreasonable question, considering our relations; but I am happy to say that I know you well enough to have no doubt of your redeeming your word—if it is in your power!"

"But how can it be otherwise?"

"I know the mission you would set out on. It is a hazardous one. You might get killed."

"Would not your object be accomplished, then, without putting you to further trouble?"

"Far from it, my dear Dick. My object is to take you *alive* into San Francisco. I don't mind admitting that it is a matter of professional pride with me. Why else should I have stuck to you as I have done?"

"And for the gratification of that pride the

dearest object of my life is to be sacrificed?" said Tiger Dick, bitterly.

"On the contrary, I shall take your place in effecting the rescue of the lady."

Black-Hoss Ben turned to Joel Brinton.

"How is it that this gentleman is so well informed in this matter?" he asked, his keen gaze reading the soul of the man under its scrutiny.

Joel Brinton hung his head in confusion.

"Is it possible," said Dick, "that you have lent yourself to so paltry a trick as this?"

"To whom should I appeal, if not to an officer of the law?" asked Mr. Brinton, feeling how poor an evasion it was.

"You were sent to *me*!" said Dick, sternly.

"Having learned your true character, do you suppose it was calculated to inspire me with confidence in you?" asked the other, with that rising anger which springs from self-condemnation.

"No! no!" said Dick, dropping his head.

"And yet—and yet," he said to himself, "she, knowing me as I am, still trusted me!"

There was comfort in that.

"You will probably have the satisfaction of remembering all your life that your act has crushed—"

He could not finish. The thought was too terrible.

"Jim," he prayed, "for God's sake, let me go! I will do anything for you hereafter. I will pledge myself to go to Frisco with you, without the necessity of so much as putting the bracelets on me. If you go on to Frisco, I will join you there of my own accord. I swear it, Jim!"

"I would do anything for you, Dick, but let you run the risk of being shot. But you forget that I am pledged to act for you. Tell me what to do, and it shall be done as if you did it yourself."

"This is the best you will do for me, Jim?"

"Yes."

"Then—"

"Look before you leap, Dick."

The sheriff whistled, short and sharp.

A cordon of armed men rose, as if out of the ground.

Tiger Dick saw that it was hopeless, and quietly extended his wrists to receive the handcuffs.

"By Jove, Dick!" said the sheriff, "it's a pleasure to deal with you. One doesn't have to argue the fact into you, when you are down."

"I have but one thing to ask of you," he said.

"You know that it is granted in advance, because I know that you will not ask anything unreasonable," said the sheriff.

"It is that you put me in security as soon as possible, and then lose no time in executing the mission you cut me off from."

"I will not."

Jim Farnsworth snapped the handcuffs on his prisoner.

Joel Brinton stepped forward with deep humiliation in face and voice.

"I want to beg your pardon," he said. "I did not know you. That is my only excuse."

"Your knowledge comes too late," said Dick, hopelessly.

He turned to Farnsworth and began to give him instructions rapidly as they proceeded toward Mulligan's Bend.

Jim Farnsworth listened attentively.

He mastered the situation, and then advised with Dick as to the best method of procedure.

To have seen them in this earnest conversation one might have taken them for a couple of intimate friends, or partners discussing some joint enterprise.

Not a trace of hostility appeared in their manner toward each other.

Joel Brinton studied them with astonishment.

"It is merely a trial of wits, in which they bear each other no malice," he reflected. "Personally, the law-breaker and the vindicator of the law may have a sort of mutual admiration, which, however, they do not allow to interfere with *business*. And the business of one may be to hang the other!"

So the sheriff and his posse, with their prisoner in their midst, entered Mulligan's Bend.

And now Jim Farnsworth's face lighted with proud triumph.

He was thinking of the challenge that had been nailed to his door on the night preceding.

The appearance of the party was the signal for wondering excitement in the camp.

It spread like wild-fire in the prairie-grass.

Men came running from every direction, to stare at Tiger Dick, at the handcuffs, and then with an admiring grin at the successful sheriff.

"Bagged him, by thunder!" shouted one of the number—no less a person than the Bloomin' Blizzard from Bloody Run!

Then he turned to Jim Farnsworth and said, with apparent heartiness:

"Boss, ye carry more sand than I took ye to. The next time I hyear ye speak I'll know ye're a-talkin'!"

"You seem to have returned from your pleasant morning's walk," said Farnsworth, looking him keenly in the eye.

"Hey!" cried the Blizzard, with no display of embarrassment, but on the contrary a sudden elation.

He drew a buckskin bag from his pocket and struck it into his other palm, crying:

"How's that, pard, fur a half-day's work? Roped in a flat! Haw! haw! haw! ye should a' seen the twist in his mug when he allowed he was bu'sted."

The bag of gold-dust was certainly a good "stake," if he had gambled for it that morning, as he said.

"But Lord love ye!" he went on, "the Leetle Shute ain't no place to spend yer money. Give me Mulligan's Bend, ur Coyote, fur Al Simon-pure fun, ring-tailed, streaked an' striped! Ef they don't clean me out hyar to-night, I'm goin', fur Coyote in the mornin', like a galoot aholt of a greased pig by the ear. But while the rocks stand by me, boss, I owe ye a treat fur puttin' my hoof in yer soup last night."

All this was said so naturally that Jim Farnsworth's suspicion was shaken.

"The fellow *may* have had nothing to do with that warning," he thought. "But I'll probe him once more, while I am on the subject."

"Did you ever see that before?" he asked, producing the paper from his pocket.

The Blizzard looked at it and laughed.

"I reckon!" he said. "Boss, what was you trailin' me fur, anyway? I ketched this hyar gent at it, fu'st. He was a-lookin' fur Tiger Dick, he said; an' it pans out as if he'd found him. But then men lie so easy, I thought he might be after him, an' then ag'in he mightn't. It was testin' him that I ketched you; an' I allowed of you was comin' back at me to git squar' fur my sass last night, it 'u'd stand me in hand to head ye off. But why ye turned tail so sharp, is what gits me yit."

And he looked at Jim with such honest questioning in his eyes, that the sheriff was fooled—swallowed the bait, hook and all!

But Six-foot Si had come up and made frank overtures to the prisoner.

"I'm sorry to see you in such a hopple so soon after our raid into Coyote," he said referring to an enterprise of two days before in which they had joined forces.

"We can't always be on top," said Dick, philosophically.

He walked among the gaping crowd like a captive king, with no appearance of humiliation at his defeat.

The "boys who lied for him straight" the day before, now looked upon the sheriff with friendly admiration in place of their previous prejudice.

He had shown his metal. He had proved himself "a man." They made him a hero at once.

So Tiger Dick sat "in durance vile," left to meditate on the scurvy trick fate had played him, guarded by men in Jim Farnsworth's interests; while the sheriff prepared to set out in quest of Yellow Jack, to redeem his pledge to Joel Brinton.

Beatrice's guardian tried to satisfy himself with the situation, and his share in bringing it about. It was better that Beatrice should owe her rescue to any one rather than to this dashing outlaw. But he must never let her know that he had betrayed Dick to his enemies on his way to her!

While he was thus striving to throw dust into his own eyes, he was startled by the appearance at his elbow of the last man he would have chosen to see.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

AD FARLEY rode into Mulligan's Bend, sought out Joel Brinton, and accosted him with marked politeness.

"I have come, sir," he said, "to beg your pardon for my rudeness of last night."

"Don't mention it," replied Joel Brinton, good-naturedly. "The circumstances amply justified some misapprehension."

"But, if you will allow me to make amends, I hope to show you that I am not wholly without more generous sentiments."

"I haven't the least doubt of it, sir. Your present manner is proof of the fact."

"You are very kind. But justice to my wife demands a word of explanation.

"I am the victim of an infirmity of temper which takes the form of an insane and wholly groundless jealousy. Although I am well aware that my security rests in my wife's integrity rather than in any merit of my own, I cannot close my eyes to the fact of her attractiveness to men in many ways better calculated than I to please a woman's fancy.

"When you were gone, a word brought me to my senses; and I am here by our joint wish to incite you to return to my house as an honored guest, that we may unite in some scheme for the rescue of your unfortunate ward without the help of Tiger Dick.

"I indorse and share my wife's hostility to him; and you doubtless have learned that your instinctive repugnance was well founded."

All this was said with a most plausible frankness of manner; so that Joel Brinton, who was yet burning with shame at his treachery to the Tiger, shrank from the chance of a second misjudgment, and so was fain to yield his former suspicions of Ad Farley.

"I have confirmed the charges of violence,

brought against his past life," he admitted, "and so established his unworthiness to be brought again into association with my ward. But I have discovered that there is a vein of nobility in him, for all that. And I tell you frankly that I regret the part I have played against him."

"May I, without indiscretion, ask what that is?"

"The part of a trickster, which has resulted in his lodgment in jail."

Ad Farley, who had just reached the camp, and knew nothing of the Tiger's capture, started.

"Tiger Dick?—in jail? Where?"

"Yonder."

"But who is holding him? How was he taken?"

"He is the prisoner of Sheriff Farnsworth."

"And to be hanged!" interrupted Farley, breathlessly.

"A very uncomfortable reflection for me, considering my share in his apprehension."

"But, my dear sir, no one ever deserved his fate more richly."

"I am afraid that I indirectly owe him nothing but gratitude," said Joel Brinton, ruefully.

"While the rest of the world owes him nothing but execration. Let him go to his fate. That disposes of him. It leaves me the alternative of permitting me to show that there is yet in reserve for you as effective aid as you lose through his incarceration."

"Excuse me. I am sensible of the kindness of yourself and wife; but the man I betrayed has repaid my treachery with a magnanimity which leaves me in doubt but that I am the greater rascal."

"May I ask what he has done so signal?"

"Freely put at my disposal all the knowledge he possessed which could be used to circumvent the villainous abductor."

"In other words, he has been generous enough not to let his grudge against you redound to the injury of the lady he has had the insolence to love!" said Ad Farley, with a disparaging sneer.

"Come! come, sir!" said Joel Brinton, with a glow of indignation, "let us give even those we hate their due. How many men do you know who, without wasting a moment in futile resentment, would accept the restraint that has been put upon him, and send upon such a mission the very man who had defeated them, only urging all expedition? I fancy, sir, that vanity would have been something of a stumbling-block in most cases of this kind."

Ad Farley bit his lip. He was not slow to see his mistake. He was dealing with a gentleman—a man of honor and of generous instincts.

"I admit the justice of your rebuke," he hastened to say. "But if you had suffered at Tiger Dick's hands what I have, you would feel that there is some extenuation for my disposition to judge him not over-kindly."

"Let us say no more about it, sir. I do not presume to arbitrate between you."

"Then you will not refuse my assistance, with such information as my wife may be able to add to what you already have?"

"Ah! I was about to reply to your kind offer. Don't think me wanting in appreciation, if the necessity for prompt action on the knowledge we already have leaves me no time to return to Coyote. Here comes the sheriff now, with the men he has recruited."

"Do I understand rightly that Farnsworth is to accompany you?"

"Yes. His service is the price of my treachery!" said Joel Brinton, with bitter humiliation.

"I beg your pardon!" said Ad Farley, with an inquiring look.

"He bargained to take Tiger Dick's place, if I betrayed him into his hands!"

"Oho! I see! You used the lady as a bait between you?"

"That's it exactly!—more shame to me!"

"All's fair in love and war!"

"A knave's motto!"

The retort was so short and sharp, that a wave of crimson swept over Ad Farley's face close on the heels of the smile with which he quoted the adage which more than almost any other has been used to justify rascality.

His chuckle of exultation was turned into an uncomfortable laugh.

Once more he was reminded that he was in the presence of a gentleman.

Jim Farnsworth's coming was just in time to spare him the necessity of a verbal reply. Truth to tell, he was at a loss for a graceful one!

The sheriff had an anxious, annoyed look on his face.

"Well?" asked Joel Brinton, quick to detect it.

"I'm afraid we shall have to go to Coyote," he said, "when we haven't any time to waste."

"What is the trouble?"

"I can't get the number of men I want."

"Why not? We mustn't stand for a money consideration, if—"

"—that were the difficulty, which it is not. I could enlist a regiment, if it went by a count of noses."

"Then what is wanted?"

"Quality, sir! It is Yellow Jack we are to meet; and I know something of his quality. It

will take *men* to match the trumps he can throw on the board."

"And the men are—"

"Where I can put my finger on them!"

The speaker was Ad Farley. His muscles were now tense, his face eager, his eyes flashing.

Jim Farnsworth turned and recognized an effective coadjutor.

"At once?" he asked.

"Without delaying you an hour. If Coyote is not in the line of your march—as I infer from your annoyance at the prospect of being compelled to go there—make any rendezvous you please; and I will guarantee to double your force as quick as horseflesh can do it."

"You're a man after my own heart!" cried Jim Farnsworth, with a soldier-like appreciation of promptness and vigor.

And he grasped the hand of as great a knave as there was in the territory!

"Make the head of Lost Canyon with as many first-class men as you can muster on the spur of the moment, and I shall be forever indebted to you, aside from such money equivalent as we can render."

"I only await your acceptance," said Farley, turning toward Joel Brinton.

"I feel that I cannot sufficiently thank you!" said the latter, with an equally hearty pressure of the hand than which there was none belonging to a greater knave in the territory!

"What a scoundrel I must be getting to be," he said to himself, "to find everybody so much better than I have adjudged them!"

"Ho for the head of Lost Canyon!" cried Ad Farley. "Let him crow loudest who is first on the field!"

And bounding into the saddle, he spurred away toward Coyote.

"Good luck is with us," said Jim Farnsworth, looking after him with satisfaction. "Now let us prove to him that we are not laggards."

"I take this as an omen of success," said Joel Brinton, hopefully.

A few minutes later they rode out of the camp at the head of their men.

Meanwhile Ad Farley spurred his horse with the mercilessness of a cruel man wrought up by excitement.

In the solitude of the mountain road he gave free vent to his long-repressed feelings.

"I have 'em now!" he hissed, between his set teeth. "Tiger Dick in irons, and this fool under my thumb! I can deal with them one at a time. This one goes down first; and I will attend to the Tiger at my leisure."

CHAPTER XVII.

BAITING A GUDGEON.

INTO Coyote he dashed, his horse gray with dust and flecked with foam.

He said nothing to gratify the curiosity of the men who stared at him as he swept by the principal saloon; but he exchanged a covert signal with one of their number, and two minutes later he was closeted with him at the Golden Serpent.

"Cosgrove," he said, "how many men have you that you can carry in your breeches-pocket?"

"It's blood, boss?" said the villainous-looking fellow, with ready understanding.

"It isn't anything else," replied Farley, indifferently. "Why else should I be particular?"

"I pass, pard! Thar ain't nothin' but blood an' hosses that counts, in this hyar country."

And he rubbed his hands with a keen relish.

"But you haven't answered my question!" said Farley, impatiently. "Come! come! I can't wait all day!"

"I allow as the galoot as you're a-layin' fur ain't in sich a blasted hurry!" said Cosgrove, with a chuckle. "Lemme see! We kin count on all o' the reg'lar boys; an' thar's—"

"The only question is, are they all within reach?"

"All as ain't stone drunk. They're layin' around somewhar."

"Rout 'em out in double-quick time!"

"Eh! spry's the word?"

"You bet it's spry! We haven't a minute to waste."

"Why didn't you spit it out in the fu'st place?"

"Git's the word!"

And with sudden animation Cosgrove took himself off.

As the door closed behind him, another opened, and the Golden Serpent glided in.

"You have not brought him back with you?" she said.

"No; but I have done better."

"How better?"

In a word Farley told the new turn affairs had taken.

"Good!" cried the woman, with a gleam of exultant malice in her face that made her look like a beautiful demon. "The Tiger in prison! But you do not mean to leave him to the chance of escape between here and Frisco?"

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"Adan!"

The woman glided up to the man, with her hand palm to palm and her shoulders drawn for-

ward, looking up into his face with lustrous eyes.

It was such a posture and such looks as Circé is wont to lure men to the devil with.

Adam Farley was thrilled as with the touch of flame. His breast labored, his eyes grew humid with emotion, as he took her beautiful face between his hands.

"My Pipa!" he responded, hoarsely.

She put her hands on his shoulders, and raised on tiptoe, so as to bring her lips close to his, crying:

"Bring me his heart! Bring me his heart!"

And she interposed a kiss between each fierce demand.

The man caught her to his breast in a passionate embrace. He choked with emotion so that he could not speak for a time. He kept swallowing to relieve the sense of oppression in his throat.

"You shall have it! I will go at once!" he cried hoarsely, as soon as he could command voice.

"No! no!" she said, in cooing accents. "The other first. You must cut off the rescuing party. He is safe, where he can wait."

"Pipa," he panted, holding her face up to the gaze of his bloodshot eyes; "why do you hate these two so remorselessly?"

"Have I not told you, you foolish boy?" she said, smiling indulgently. "But you will never do better, I'm afraid."

And her sweet kisses were pressed daintily on his lips.

"Tell me again," he said. "I am eating my heart out with the feeling that there must be love back of it all somewhere."

"It isn't three days since I frankly told you that he had paid me the compliment of his admiration. Is it necessary to add that the lady was jealous? You ought to understand that!"

And she laughed at him easily—the laugh of indulgent affection.

"But why should you hate them for that?"

The woman's eyes flashed, and her nostrils dilated and quivered.

"When I put him off as politely and considerately as I could, he had the ingratitude to save his credit with his sweetheart by making sacrifice of my dignity. He had the effrontery to tell her to my face that I had courted *him*! It goes without saying that she did not spare me the lash of her scorn; though her quarrel and separation shows that she did not fully believe him."

Then with a sudden outburst, she cried:

"Mother of God! that I should have lived to such unmerited humiliation!"

And her love of the moment before lost in the sense of outrage that now seemed to possess her, she sought to withdraw herself from his embrace.

Completely hoodwinked by this clever lying, he detained her with clinging arms, the cloud of suspicion lifting from his face, his bent brows relaxing, and all the hard lines adjusting themselves to an expression of tender gratitude and satisfaction.

"My Pipa! my Pipa!" he breathed, passing his hand round and round her face caressingly.

"Look you!" she cried, suddenly seizing hold of him, and in her passion relapsing into her native Spanish idiom. "For his lying treachery I would have his base heart in my hand, that I may spit upon it and put it under my foot. But she! the woman—ah! I would have her live!—live the veriest slave of one who is the most loathsome to her on earth! Ha! ha! my vengeance could not find her a master more to my liking than Yellow Jack! Swear to me that you will frustrate this effort to release her! Swear that you will not return alive until this old dotard of a guardian is put beyond all interest in her fate, and the sheriff has been turned from his purpose!"

"I swear it!" cried Farley, now haunted by no lingering doubt.

A clatter of hoofs was heard without.

"Cosgrove!" said Farley. "Ah, my darling! that I should be torn from you at this moment of all in our lives!"

He hung over her in an ecstasy.

"Go! go!" she said, in low, thrilling tones.

"But return!"

A moment he feasted on the warm pressure of her pulpy lips, the magnetic touches of her velvety palms, the liquid tenderness of her eyes, and then left all these seductive sweets behind, to go on his mission of blood.

She cast herself on the floor in a paroxysm which for a time had something akin to madness in it.

Her hands were clutched until the fingernails wounded the delicate palm; her teeth bit through the rounded lip with no consciousness of pain; she panted with the labored breathing of one in a fit.

This was the reaction after the repression of feeling which enabled her to carry through successfully the perfidious little drama with which she had completely hoodwinked Ad Farley.

"Ah! I shall end by killing him!" she sighed, when she had recovered sufficiently to speak. "But that he serves my hatred so well, I would have stabbed him while he caressed me. But the

time is coming—it is near at hand—when this farce must end. I *will* not kiss lips I have learned to so loathe! Ah! my darling! my darling! did *he* but give me a tithe of the love that this wretch pours at my feet!"

She fell to weeping, with a mingling of tenderness and rage and despair.

"But I must act, and at once!" she cried, suddenly rousing herself. "If he returns and finds my mission unexecuted, it will be I that have fired him to the blow that would pierce my heart."

"First Yellow Jack, and then my love! But first of all, a dummy to cover my escapade."

She went to her chamber, and after a thorough sifting of her wardrobe, selected a complete suit of attire, which seemed adapted to her purpose.

That night, in response to her summons, a young Mexican stood before her with an inquiring look on his rather effeminate face.

"What is my lady's wish?" he asked.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN'S CUNNING.

SHE looked at him a moment before replying. She saw a man of short stature and exceptionally slight build. There was a womanish delicacy about the smoothness of his skin and the shapeliness of his hands.

He was dressed in Spanish costume, his head being bound in a silk handkerchief.

"Giacomo," she said, presently, "stand just here as I place you."

"I am at the *senora's* command," he said, wondering at this strange proceeding, and his little ferret eyes on the alert for any look or gesture to indicate her purpose.

She led him before a mirror, and turned him with his side toward it.

She then placed herself back to back with him, and looked into the mirror.

"Ah!" she cried, delightedly, "I am right! Giacomo, you are a gem of a man!"

The Mexican turned round as she did so, and they faced each other, she smiling with an innocent, childish pleasure in her beautiful eyes; he flushing a deep scarlet.

"Well?" he said, with a low bow, biting his lips with humiliation.

"There is not half an inch difference in our heights!" she cried gayly.

"My lady is pleased to jest," he replied, hiding the glow in his eyes beneath his long, dark lashes, so like a girl's.

"On the contrary, it is no jest with me, I assure you."

"I wait your pleasure."

"Put your hand here on the table, my Giacomo," she petitioned of him, with a bewitching smile.

"It is a pleasure to gratify *senora's* idlest whim," he said, with a shade of sarcasm in his voice.

However, he complied with perfect readiness to her wish.

She ranged hers beside it.

"Ah! Mother of God!" she cried, with a mock pettish grimace, "there is no choice between them! It is a shame if I am not to have a smaller hand than you, nor fairer! I shall cry my eyes out with rage! What a clumsy paw it is, of a verity."

And she struck one hand with the other.

"My lady has summoned me here for her amusement," said the Spaniard, keeping his temper admirably.

"No indeed!" was the wide-eyed assurance.

"For what then, may I ask?"

"To test your devotion to me."

"You need no assurance of that."

"We shall see within the hour. Prove it by doing as I bid you without question."

"Afford me but the opportunity."

"Very well! Give me your hand—so! There! you see my ring goes on your finger as if it were the hand of a bride."

"Which is a way of telling me that I should be more manly?"

"Oh, no! I am too well pleased with you as you are."

She caught up a bit of lace and threw it over his wrist.

"See!" she cried, with renewed delight. "Would not one take that for a lady's hand?"

The fact was too evident for dispute; but the Spaniard would have been more or less than man to admit it.

He remained silent.

The Golden Serpent entered into this comparison with a childish liveliness of interest.

Her next exploit was to draw up his sleeve and lay bare his arm.

"Santissima Virgen!" she cried, putting her own beside it, "some malicious demon inspired me to send for you that I might die of envy! I did not know that I was so hideously ugly."

But, notwithstanding her pretty pout, she knew that this was a gratuitous affront to her shapely member. The Spaniard's skin was as smooth as hers, but the muscles lying beneath it denied it the rounded symmetry of its rival.

She put her head on one side with bird-like grace, and pretended to scan it critically.

"If I had a lover," she said, "I would not

use you as a foil—I promise you that, my Giacomo."

"If I were that lover," he replied, "you would have need of no foil."

She held up a warning finger.

"Tut! tut! Such good friends as you and I never descend to the insincerity of compliment. There's a lie always lurking in a gallant speech."

Then looking at him curiously, she abruptly went back to her previous line of thought.

"If the gods have given you the shoulders of a woman!" she burst forth, clasping her hands in a sort of ecstasy of expectation.

The Spaniard was visibly startled at her implied proposal.

"Senora!" he exclaimed.

"Think you, my Giacomo," she said, archly, "that you have a shoulder to rival mine?"

The Spaniard now flushed with embarrassment.

"My lady is pleased to indulge a strange freak this evening," he said.

"Eh, *Dios!*" she ejaculated, with a shrug.

"Why not? Is there more harm in a woman looking at a man's shoulder than in a man looking at a woman's shoulder? Come! come! my Giacomo, you are getting prudish! Suppose the fashion were the other way? Then there might be some reason in my delicacy taking the alarm. But with you, a man! Nonsense! If you need protection, you can call to Iron-fisted Tom."

And with a laugh she proceeded to unfasten his jacket at the throat.

But the man was shamefaced enough. The whole proceeding was so new in his experience, so entirely unheard-of, that no reasoning could allay his sense of discomfort.

However, he submitted to have his shoulder laid bare for inspection.

But, after a glance, the Golden Serpent shook her head decidedly.

"No," she said, "it is plain that we cannot put you in a dress *decollete*."

"In a what?" he cried, aghast.

"In a dress cut low in the neck," she answered, with as matter-of-fact an air as if that were an everyday occurrence.

"*Por Dios!* I should say not!" cried the Spaniard, with a show of feeling closely bordering on indignation.

The lady laughed.

"It is incredible that you fellows should be so painfully modest—in *some things*! But I once saw a picture in one of the illustrated papers of the East, where the hero of a rowing match was receiving his honors from the hands of a young girl of perhaps eighteen, in the midst of a mixed assemblage consisting principally of ladies, and he, the oarsman, far more scantily dressed than the suggestion which you find so startling."

"But a rowing-costume is one thing, and petticoats quite another."

"Oho! that is your difficulty? It is not, then, a matter of modesty, but of vanity."

"It is very like the aversion that you would feel to wearing a man's apparel."

"If you had no greater prejudice against the one dress than I have against the other, we should soon terminate this discussion, my Giacomo, and to the satisfaction of us both. However, let us waive that for the moment, and see if I cannot furnish you with good precedent for moderating the bitterness of your scorn of feminine attire."

"I doubt your ability to do so."

"Listen! Have not the priesthood of all religions worn gowns not unlike a woman's dress? Look even at the lace with which the Holy Mother Church has adorned the skirts of her sacred bishops."

The Spaniard crossed himself and bowed reverently.

"All honor to the ever blessed Queen of Heaven and to her reverend ministers!" he said. "But whither does all this tend? What is your purpose?"

"It is necessary that I go away without my absence being known. But this is impossible unless some one personate me at the faro-table. You know that I never appear except *en masque*, and that my voice is never heard unless I choose to break the restriction I have placed upon myself. Now I can easily disguise you so that no one will suspect the imposture. The only question is—shall I owe to your regard for me such a sacrifice of your masculine vanity?"

"But, *amiga mia*, the merest accident might betray me, when these accursed *Americanos* would tar and feather me. I should be the scorn and laughing-stock of the world to the day of my death! *Madre de Dios!* is this mere vanity?"

"*Giacomo mio!*" said the siren, in her most dulcet tones, "do you suppose that I would consent to such a hazard for you? Listen then a little. You have but to deal the cards in silence; and who would have reason to suspect? Come! You shall array yourself in the dress I have chosen; and if we are not counterparts to the eye, I will release you freely."

It was not accomplished all in a moment; but it was plain that she had marked influence over him; and in the end he consented to go into her dressing-room and don the strange attire, while she waited for him in her boudoir.

When he appeared, the alterations in his figure showed the skill with which he had carried

out her instructions. She had but to add a mask, hide the muscular part of his forearms by making up with lace the deficiency of the short sleeves, and put her rings on his fingers, to produce herself in duplicate.

"*Mira!*" she cried, in triumph.

"It is wonderful!" he was forced to admit.

That night Giacomo dealt faro, while the Golden Serpent herself couched away on horseback, through gorge and along precipice, arrayed in his garb.

She made as piquant a little Spanish don as ever was seen.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLUTTERING OF THE BIRD.

WHEN Beatrice awoke to consciousness, after her abduction by Yellow Jack, she found herself lying in a bunk of the rudest construction, filled with mountain moss covered by a blanket.

Her shelter was a single-roomed hut, with a mud-daubed Mexican fire-place in one corner.

Before the fire, over which simmered a pot throwing out a rank odor as of some devil's ragout, crouched on a stone a shriveled little old crone.

Her wrinkled face was as brown as weather-worn leather, and the fingers of her skinny hands were crooked and armed with nails like talons.

As Beatrice moved, the crone left off stirring the pot, and looked round.

The girl was not reassured by the wicked little eyes that were fixed upon her with crafty watchfulness.

"Where am I?" she asked.

The crone shook her head.

"No sable!" she replied, in a squeaking voice.

"Cannot you speak a word of English?" asked the girl, with a deepening feeling of desolation.

"No sable," repeated the crone, with no manifestation of feeling, either sympathetic or the reverse.

With a moan of despair the girl let her head fall back upon her couch, and so lay with closed eyes.

Without the hut she could hear the noise of a party of rough men.

One was singing a song in Spanish, at the refrain of which his companions laughed uproariously.

Others were wrangling, with many a hissed and snarled Mexican oath rolling the R with savage intensity. They were probably gamblers bickering over their gains and losses.

Presently some one beat on what sounded like a box with his pistol-butt, shouting:

"Ho, Carmina! my little love of a Carmina! *Sangre Christi!* we are starving out here!"

"*Leperos! Ladrones!*" muttered the crone, adding a running fire of Spanish oaths.

"Carmina! sweet Carmina! pretty Carmina!" persisted the rogue without, in a mock-wheedling tone.

"*Poco tiempo!* Wait but a little then!" squeaked the crone, showing that she had lied to Beatrice as to her understanding of English.

And spitting out imprecations at her tormentor with the spitefulness of a cat, she stirred the pot with malicious impatience.

Then came the clatter of approaching hoofs and shouts of welcome.

Thrilled by a shrill Indian war-whoop, Beatrice started up from her couch, and peered through a chink in the loose wall.

Just before the hut she saw a group of men with the lawless, swaggering air of bandits, some of whom had started up from their previous occupation to receive an approaching party of horsemen, though the gamblers had only turned their heads.

Beatrice shivered with fear at sight of the newcomers, who had all the appearance of a war-party of savages.

But it was plain that they were on amicable terms with the white outlaws; for the latter greeted them with eager familiarity.

One who rode in advance swung what looked like a scalp above his head; and he it was who sounded the savage war-cry.

The outlaws received him with laughter and wondering curiosity.

"What in Cain air you gettin' through you now, you blatherskite?" cried one.

"Woo-woo-woo-woo-woo-woo!" shouted the seeming Indian chief leaping to the ground and flourishing his trophy in the faces of the puzzled outlaws.

"Ye didn't have the gall to scalp the old gent in dead earnest?"

"Scalp nothin'. It's a wig, I'll be blowed."

Then, while the two parties intermingled, with shrieks of laughter and a rough-and-tumble struggle for possession of the trophy, Beatrice realized that the seeming savages were only white men in disguise, and that they had practiced some sort of a practical joke, if not worse, on her old friend.

A moment later they were busied doffing their savage paraphernalia and washing their faces; and from their laughing and profane recounting of their adventure to their companions she learned what had happened to stanch old Joel Brinton.

In the midst of her own peril the girl's cheeks

burned and her eyes blazed with generous indignation.

The one drop of comfort in the wretched situation was the thought that she had not brought the death peril on her friend.

"He is alive and unharmed," she said to herself. "Thank God for that! And he will seek to release me; he will go to—to—"

But the name died on her lips, and she dropped her face in her hands, while wave after wave of crimson swept from neck to temples.

She was frightened by the wild beating of her heart and by the thrills of delight and tenderness that shot through her at the thought of the coming of her bold champion, rushing to her rescue.

In the fullness of her confidence in him she was glad that Yellow Jack had made it necessary to appeal to him.

Again and again she assured herself that nothing should come of it. She would only see him once more, and part with him a little more kindly.

How cruelly she had let him go without a word of gratitude, after all he had done for her! Whatever sins might rest upon his soul, he had rescued her from a fate worse than death, at the peril of his life.

No! no! nothing should come of it; only she would tell him that—that—

And there she stopped with her head in a whirl.

In the midst of this moment of ecstasy a chill of fear shot to her heart.

She heard a harsh, snarling voice that she knew only too well.

"Caramba! what is all this uproar? Are you trying to fetch the Vigilantes down upon us? *Por Dios!* one would think that there was no one between the Pacific and the plains!"

Instantly the rough horse-play of the outlaws ceased, and they slunk away with sullen frowns.

The man who had exercised this control over them was a *mestizo*, or half-breed, with a golden bronze complexion derived from his Indian mother, and to which he owed his name of Yellow Jack.

He was dressed in the fanciful Mexican garb, and wore it with a certain swaggering grace.

With curt imperiousness he drew from the man who still retained possession of Joel Brinton's wig an account of how he had discharged his mission.

Of the pleasantries which had cost its victim so much annoyance, besides exposing him to the peril of Ad Farley's jealousy, Yellow Jack took no notice; but contenting himself with enjoining greater quiet on his men, he strode toward the hut where his shrinking prisoner awaited him tremblingly.

As his pistol butt rung an imperious summons on the door, Beatrice stood like a frightened fawn, looking for some avenue of escape.

But when the crone admitted him he found his prisoner self-possessed, with the mien of a captive princess.

"Well, fair cousin!" he said, with an air of gay cordiality, "I congratulate myself on the change in your plans about leaving us."

"There is no change in my utter detestation of you!" she retorted.

"Nor in my love and admiration for you!" he said, with a smile and a bow.

"If this is the purpose of your intrusion here, sir, I must submit to your insults, since you have the brute force and the brutal propensity to inflict them."

"If you knew how beautiful you look when you are angry, you wouldn't tempt me in that way to follow up the advantage I hold over you."

"I do not hope to affect your villainous purposes one way or the other."

"Nevertheless, you can mold me to your will, if you care to, after submitting graciously to the inevitable."

"If you consult my wife, anything, you will merely relieve me of your presence."

"As my wife, I expect you to account my presence a pleasure."

"Your wife! I would rather harbor with the most loathsome reptile—"

"Come! come!" interrupted Yellow Jack, roughly. "You've gone far enough in that deal. I don't like the run of the cards. I suppose you have sense enough to know that, if you can't be won by fair words, there are other means which will fetch you, whether you will or no!"

"I have sufficient knowledge of you to need no assurance that you are equal to the employment of any means, the most despicable, which you fancy will secure your purpose."

"You may pile your chips on one thing, my dear. I mean to marry you, if I have to stand you on your head!"

The *mestizo* was livid with rage. His black eyes scintillated like the bead-like orbs of a snake. His quivering lip bared his fang-like teeth. His voice had the harsh snarl of an enraged hyena.

This violence jarred upon the fine nerves of the girl, so that she quailed, though her royal scorn of him was not diminished.

She made no reply; her throat swelled with rising hysteria.

Under the influence of her steady gaze, Yellow Jack got himself in hand with sullen doggedness.

"You'll find me an ugly customer if you don't play to my lead," he said; "but if you come down handsome you might draw to your hand all day, and get a worse card than Yellow Jack every time. I've come to say that you'll have some days to think the thing over here; and if, when I get back, you have made up your mind to do the honors as Mrs. Jack Dukes with grace, we'll let bygones be bygones. I'd rather treat you white, if you'll let me. If I don't, it will be your own fault."

Thereupon he turned upon his heel and left her.

Beatrice cast herself upon the bunk, and gave vent to her overwrought feelings in a flood of tears.

The crone, who had stolidly stirred the pot throughout the stormy interview, continued her monotonous occupation unmoved by the girl's distress.

An hour later, under Yellow Jack's lead, the outlaws rode out of the glen which formed their mountain home, and all was wrapped in the stillness of primeval nature.

On the following day, the natural buoyancy of her nature asserting itself, Beatrice ventured out of the hut.

She and her Mexican duenna were the only human beings visible anywhere about, and she concluded that her captor trusted to the crone and the isolation of their retreat for her security.

But instead of following her about, as she expected, the old hag, when not engaged in active service, seemed to alternate between stirring the mysterious decoction and dozing.

At first Beatrice kept close to the hut, but as days passed she became more venturesome.

She met no one, and the crone remained indifferent to her movements.

Then her heart began to beat with a wild hope.

Could it be that Yellow Jack felt secure in her woman's weakness only? She knew nothing of the leagues of weary wandering and the peril from starvation and wild beasts that lay between her and human sympathy; but if the attempt at escape was open to her, anything were preferable to continuance in his detested power.

A careful reconnoissance showed her that there was but one exit from the glade—the pass through which the outlaws had gone.

Peering about her with the weariness of a timid hare, she passed through this, until she stood without the rampart of circumambient peaks, with all the labyrinthine windings of the mountain gorges before her to choose from.

Had she the courage, had she the strength to plunge into that trackless waste and grope her way blindly after her kind? Where men were, there was life, there was hope; but between lay desolation and death!

"It is but death at the worst!" she cried to herself. "I'll do it!"

But she must not start wholly unprepared. Food was indispensable. For the rest she must trust to her readiness of resource, her energy, her endurance, and perchance good fortune.

She went back to the hut in such a way that she could keep her eye on the door.

She found the hag asleep.

This was proof conclusive that she had not been followed.

She resolved to make the attempt to escape that night. Such a start would insure several hours free from vigilance.

She found no difficulty in secreting food about her person. Her enemy slept. With heart beating almost to suffocation she stole forth in the darkness.

She traversed the glen, entered the pass, and followed its windings to its outer mouth, when—

"Diablo!" muttered a voice, so near that it seemed as if she could almost reach forth her hand and touch the speaker.

She pressed her hand to her heart, and shrunk gasping to the ground.

For a moment it seemed to the startled girl as if she were on the point of dying.

She had the race prejudice against all foreigners which is our common heritage from the barbarous past. A Spaniard, at the best, was a person to be suspected of a propensity to cut throats and stab in the back. So to be alone in that desolate place with a Mexican, and an outlaw at that, was an insupportable horror.

Added to that was the crushing disappointment of the balking of her hopes.

"The bird is ready for flight so soon?" asked another voice, so high-pitched and smooth as to be womanly.

Beatrice started. She had a vague, elusive sense of recognition.

"She paused through here to-day, on the lookout for some sign of restraint, and if she has the courage, will perhaps make an attempt to escape to-night," said the first speaker.

"My Victor, you, who are the very devil with the señoritas, should pay court to her. My faith! she is a tempting morsel!"

"The Señor Captain would make a very untempting morsel of you, little Pancho, did he hear your suggestions?"

"But, blood of my body! she should not be forced to wed with one whom she so heartily detests. But thou, thou gallant knave! what sweetheart could ever say thee nay? I tell thee, brave Victor, thou wouldst do her good service to run away with her, since she is so ready to run."

The speaker laughed; but the other in a contemptuous tone made some reply in Spanish which Beatrice could not understand.

They were standing in a part of the pass so narrow that it would be impossible to get by them undiscovered, the more that they were on the watch for her.

This covert espionage was like the sheathed claws of a wild beast. It turned the captive sick at heart with hopelessness.

After his brusque rejection of his companion's venomous suggestion, she had not the same fear of Victor as before; but from the man addressed as "little Pancho" she shrunk with a shuddering sense of loathing, as from a viper.

His smooth, flexible, insinuating voice and the intimation that he was small in stature conjured up before her imagination a human reptile without conscience and without truth.

She sought to creep away and hide herself in the wickiup, under the slender protection of the old crone.

A stone was dislodged by her incautious tread.

"Hah!" cried Pancho. "That is our fugitive already upon us."

Beatrice waited for no more, but with fear-winged feet darted away.

"Mira! mira!" cried the inspirer of her dread.

"She is as fleet as Diana!"

She thought that she heard his tread in pursuit, though this was only a trick of her imagination; and when she burst into the shanty she was ready to sink to the floor with breathless exhaustion.

It was plain that the crone was roused from sleep. She blinked her snake-like little eyes, and muttered some dozen or more Spanish oaths in a whining, petulant treble. But, though the girl leaned panting against the door with her hands pressed over her heart, the hag manifested no interest in the cause of her agitation.

Her cat-like irritation thus vented, she curled up and covered her head, to woo again her disturbed slumbers.

By the dim light of the dying embers, Beatrice looked at the shapeless heap, and listened to the occasional mutterings that came from it.

She did not wonder that, in an age a little more superstitious perhaps than our own, spiteful old women had been taken for witches. She felt that she was being cursed.

She was not so credulous as to believe that such appeals would avail anything to her detriment. It would be a strange god who would thus wait upon the malice of his creatures, to aid them in wreaking their hatred upon one another, and if there were evil-disposed devils, they would probably need no such prompting. But there was something horrible in being the object of such malignant spite just when she most needed human sympathy.

In the midst of her reflections there came a sharp rap on the door, as if with the hilt of a dagger, at the very point where her head rested against it.

It was so startlingly close to her ear, that she sprang away, with no thought of an attempt to bar the entrance of the applicant.

There was no fastening to the door, and she felt that her woman's strength would avail nothing against that of even a small man, as she pictured Pancho.

She had no doubt that it was he, and indeed it proved to be.

"Open to me, fair señorita!" he called, in tones of mock gallantry.

The girl cowered in the furthest corner of the room, with dilated eyes fixed on the door.

It was presently opened without further ceremony, and a dapper little Mexican dandy, not so tall as herself, crossed the threshold.

CHAPTER XX.

A PASSAGE AT ARMS.

BEATRICE could see that the intruder was in full Spanish costume; and from the glinting of the buttons and braid and the heavy bullion *torquilla* that adorned his sombrero, she judged of its richness.

He took his cigarette from his lips, and doffed his sombrero with a profound bow, saying in the usual phrase of politeness which sounds so strangely exaggerated to English ears:

"Señorita, I kiss your feet!"

The girl made no reply, but only fixed her wide eyes upon his mocking face.

His slender black mustache was lifted in a smile that disclosed his white teeth.

He entered the room, closing the door behind him.

Beatrice now felt that she would appeal to the protection of Victor; but there was no sign of his vicinity. Content with keeping his post, he had probably handed her over to the tender mercies of this little monster.

Instinctively she stretched forth her hand and placed it on the shoulder of the crone, who thus far had not moved, though it was clear that she had not yet gone to sleep.

But this placed no embargo on her tongue. She overwhelmed Beatrice with a perfect torrent of abuse, and then wound up:

"Look you! I go, first to Yellow Jack, to tear out of his heart any pity that he might have for you; then to Senor Hameelton, to strike off his chains, and so win his gratitude and admiration, which I will take care to fan into love!"

Then, exhausting all her stock of Spanish execration, which she emphasized with shrewish stamps of her foot, she tore out of the wickiup, slamming the door with an emphasis not at all peculiar to Mexico.

A moment later she was risking her pretty neck by urging her horse at an incautious pace through the mountain gorges in the darkness.

Beatrice sat almost stunned.

The crone threw the blanket over her head, and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

HIDE AND SEEK.

ON going to Yellow Jack's retreat, the Golden Serpent had found a single guard, with whom she was well acquainted, in charge of Beatrice. They had detected the girl's approach; and the conversation she overheard was a comedy to prepare her for the trick Pipa afterward played upon her.

Informed of the *mestizo*'s whereabouts by Victor, the Mexican now tore away in quest of him.

The blood of his father was scarcely yet cold on her stiletto; but she knew him well enough to feel sure that that would not make her unwelcome, if she brought anything that would aid him in the execution of his schemes.

In this she was not disappointed. He received her sullenly, yet with a willingness to listen to what she had to say.

"Why are you trifling here," she demanded, "when that is in train which will balk all of your purposes?"

"What is in train?" he asked.

"Has it not occurred to you that there might be some effort made by the friends of your prisoner to effect her release?"

"Let them try it!" said Yellow Jack, with a swagger.

"You do not know, then, that you have come within an ace of having Black-Hoss Ben against you? One would think that, with your past experience of him as an adversary, you would be a little on your guard."

Stung by this sneer, the *mestizo* scowled blackly.

"He will not always have a woman to interpose and save his tender hide!" he said.

The Golden Serpent smiled. Her hand it was that had protected the Tiger from the greatest ignominy that had ever menaced him.

"He will not need it!" she retorted, sharply.

"Meanwhile," said Yellow Jack, "you have intimated that he was not in question just now."

"No. It is her guardian who is on your track."

"A harmless old imbecile!"

"Don't be too sure of that. I have had enough acquaintance with him to know that he has far more pluck and address than you give him credit for. Besides, he has enlisted Jim Farnsworth, the Frisco detective, in his service; and, thoroughly informed as to your haunts by Black-Hoss Ben, they are now on their way to unearth you, with forty good men at their backs."

"Why does not Black-Hoss Ben come himself?"

"He may not feel sufficient interest in the lady," replied the Golden Serpent, contemptuously.

"I didn't suppose that you would succeed in weaning him from his old predilection," retorted the *mestizo*, with a meaning smile.

"Be that as it may," rejoined the Golden Serpent, keeping her temper, "the fact remains, that he was content to give her guardian information that would enable him to work out his own purpose."

Yellow Jack was more disturbed by the threatened attack than he wished should appear. With a number of rapid and pointed questions he sought to learn just what he had to provide against, and immediately gave orders to a subordinate to get his men in readiness to move.

The Golden Serpent then seized him by the wrist, with sudden passionate intensity.

"Look you!" she cried. "It is not for love of you that I am your ally in this."

"I need no assurance of that fact," replied the *mestizo*.

"I hate the white-faced donna you have in your power!"

"A common failing with you ladies, I believe!"

"Put your foot upon her! Grind her into the dust of humiliation! Break her accursed pride!"

"I shall be content if I succeed in getting her mouey!" laughed Yellow Jack. "To the rest I am quite indifferent."

"But have you no revenge to glut?"

"Against her? She has never injured me, except in exercising the poor taste to prefer another."

"And that other? You who have no cause to love him—cannot you strike him through her? *Madre de Dios!* the accursed blood of the North in your veins must have chilled you strangely!"

"I have not forgotten that," said the *mestizo*, with a malignant scowl. "It is a part of my purpose to have him as one of the witnesses of my marriage."

With a thrill of dread the Golden Serpent congratulated herself on not having betrayed the fact that Tiger Dick was then a helpless prisoner, who might be snatched from his present guards by a bold dash of the outlaws.

"There is no time for that," she hastened to say. "If you get back to the glen in advance of the detective and his men, you will be fortunate."

Acting on her suggestion, Yellow Jack at once set out for his retreat, while the Golden Serpent went her way to Mulligan's Bend.

She had been almost continuously in the saddle for close upon forty hours. Her horse was well-nigh spent, and only her fierce passion sustained her.

Meanwhile, unable to sleep after her exciting passage at arms with the Golden Serpent Beatrice spent the night and following day awaiting her captor's return with shuddering dread.

After nightfall she dropped into an exhausted slumber, to be roused from a horrible nightmare by the clatter of hoofs and the sound of excited voices.

The outlaws dashed into the glen in a body, and remained in the saddle while their leader burst into the hut.

"Come!" he cried, before he was fairly in to the room. "There is no time to be nice about propriety. Where are your clothes? You must be dressed and in the saddle inside of sixty seconds."

"Ah! that's better. That saves time."

His last words were caused by seeing her spring from her bed completely dressed. The fact was that, apprehensive of his brutal intrusion at any moment, the girl had not removed her clothes since she had been in his power.

"Get your bonnet and shawl," he continued, without break. "Where are they?"

Then as she stood dazed by a flood of the wildest hopes, which sprung from the perception of his excitement, he caught them up, and seizing hold of her arm, hurried her out of the house, crying:

"Come! come!—no lagging. Do you hope to detain me to the advantage of a rescuing party? I suppose you are on the lookout for that cut-throat lover of yours. I am sorry to disappoint you; but it appears that, not gallant enough to fly to your rescue himself, he yet had the goodness to put your guardian in the way of finding me out, and it is his skin that I shall perhaps have to fill with bullets, after having let him off once because I had no grudge against him."

"If he reaches the mouth of the glen before we get out, you will have an excellent opportunity to exercise discretion. You surely know me too well to need more than a hint that any attempt to escape on your part will be met by a *summary*, if not altogether polite check!"

While speaking, he had hustled her out of the shanty and on to the back of a horse.

Then came a breathless dash for the pass out of the glen, in which Beatrice could only cling to her horse to prevent being thrown and trampled under foot.

The time might come when she would leap off and risk everything; but it was not yet.

"It is he! it is he!" she kept repeating to herself. "What were this villain's oath to the contrary? Let me but see him and I will leap into his arms! Then I shall be safe!—safe! Oh, my darling! my hero brave and strong!"

In that moment all disguise was swept to the winds. She loved him with her whole heart and soul. He was coming, her heart's delight, to snatch her from the clutches of this odious abductor; and all her scrupulous resolves vanished like snow before the sun.

Away! away like the wind, amid a rattle of stones loosened by their horses' hoofs and a furious swishing of boughs, as the foliage of the trees through which they dashed whipped the riders in the face with blinding force.

Some one's beast stumbled and went down with a crash, hurling his rider over his head down the rocky declivity.

Men uttered short, sharp cries of warning, and reined their horses aside. The excited animals plunged and snorted, but no one pulled up to see how fared the unlucky wight who had gone down, possibly to death or the agony of broken limbs.

On! on! when every tread might be on the threshold of death!

In the wild confusion of that breathless rush, the peril of the moment drove every other consideration out of the captive's mind. The necessity of keeping her seat came before all things.

Her head was in a whirl when she heard wild shouts of rage and defiance, followed by pistol-shots.

She heard other yells and the rattle of other firearms than those in her immediate vicinity. They were the rescuers. Her heart swelled. How could she aid them?

But a painful grip on her arm caused her to turn and confront Yellow Jack's villainous countenance.

"This way, my dear!"

And with a hand on her bridle-rein, he drew her horse into the shelter of some rocks, and there stopped.

The rest swept on, and a furious running fight ensued.

"Now then, my dear, one scream from your musical throat might frustrate all my plans, but this will be my requital, if you are so ungracious as to put me in an awkward predicament.

And drawing a murderous-looking bowie, he with its keen point punctured the delicate skin of her wrist so that a single drop of blood oozed from the wound.

"Don't give me occasion to use it more seriously!" he said, grimly.

The girl shrunk with a shiver of dread from the glittering knife; but there was a visible struggle between her fear and her longing to send her voice ringing to the heart of Tiger Dick.

What was her agony at the thought that he was so near, yet unconscious of her vicinity, was being led away on a false scent by her foes?

It seemed as if her heart would burst—as if she must cry out to him. All the hope and happiness of her life might hang upon letting him know that she was there.

But Yellow Jack, with the point of that horrible knife menacing her bosom, smiled with a hyena-like drawing of the quivering lip back from the white teeth.

"I shall escape," he said, "and your lover will be welcome to what I leave behind."

And the girl was mute.

The sounds of the fight went further and further down the mountain gorges. She dropped her head on her breast in despair.

"Come!" said Yellow Jack, when unbroken silence reigned again.

And by a circuitous route he proceeded to lead her through the mountain fastnesses.

They had gone but a little distance, when they were startled by a pistol-shot quite close at hand; and immediately afterward a faint voice cried out:

"Help! Help! Help!"

The voice was that of a man in pain. Beatrice recognized it, and pictured to herself her devoted old friend shot down almost under her eye.

Thrilled as if by an electric shock, she forgot all else.

"Uncle Joe!" she cried.

And slipping to the ground, she fled in the

direction of the voice with the fleetness of a fawn.

With a oath, Yellow Jack drew his revolver and spurred after her.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BLOW IN THE BACK.

AD FARLEY rode out of Coyote at the head of nearly a score of as villainous-looking fellows as could well be found.

"Boys," he said, "we're goin' into a sham fight; but we're goin' to send a few ornery galoots over the range, for all that—not too many, ye understand, but jest enough to make it interestin'."

A murmur of bloodthirsty satisfaction ran through the crowd at the conclusion of this speech.

"Is there ary man in this crowd that's in love with Mulligan's Bend?" he pursued.

A snarl of enraged dissent was his answer.

"Waal, boys, we're goin' to fight cheek by jowl with a lot of Mulligan Bendites, under the lead of Jim Farnsworth, the Frisco detective. How's that?"

He looked about on the puzzled faces, which expressed anything but relish for this prospect.

"Cap," said one, "ef so be you could range us on the other side, now, I allow it would suit a heap better. Eh, fellers?"

A Babel of ejaculatory assent showed that the crowd was in hearty sympathy with the speaker.

Ad Farley laughed.

"That's what I like to hear!" he said. "Waal, you're goin' to git all the meat ye want this trip! We kin knock 'em over from their own ranks as handily as from the other side, and without half the risk. That's our leetle game!"

There was no revolting at this shameless treachery. On the other hand, the men looked eager for a fuller explanation.

Farley detailed the situation to them, concluding:

"Now, boys, this hyar quarrel between the detective an' Yellow Jack ain't none of our funeral. Ef I had my choice, I'd say Yellow Jack every time. But that's neither hyar nor thar. What we're after is a chance to come back at Mulligan's Bend fur their invasion of our camp t'other day."

A yell of vindictive hatred was the crowd's indorsement.

"The thing's got to be done handy," pursued Farley, "so's they won't drop to our racket. Half of our crowd wants to be in the front of the fight, a-goin' fur the enemy as if they was wild to eat 'em up. But the other half hangs back and watches their chance to drop a Mulligan Bender out of his saddle.

"Anybody will do to yell an' burn powder; but it will take a quick man and a knowledgible to sling his meat and not git spotted. I'll pick them out myself, so's every man will know jest what he is to do."

He thereupon selected his men.

"Now, boys," he continued, "thar's one snoozer that's *my* meat—this hyar old sinner with a billiard-ball fur a knowledge-box. I know him 'way back; an' I've been layin' fur him sence before some o' you was born."

This lie was to hide his real motive for hatred against Joel Brinton.

Everything thus arranged, they joined the detective and his force at the place of rendezvous.

Jim Farnsworth was gratified at the soldier-like promptness with which Farley had reacted.

The men of Mulligan's Bend showed by their lowering looks that they were not any too well pleased with their associates.

However, there was no suspicion of foul play.

That night they camped together amicably enough, and on the following day came upon Yellow Jack just making his escape from the glen.

The confusion of the running fight that ensued gave Ad Farley's treacherous crew every opportunity they wanted.

Yellow Jack's men were scattered like chaff before the wind; but they made a sufficiently stubborn fight to cover the murderous perfidy of their faithless allies.

As Ad Farley saw men whom he had marked for death topple out of their saddles, he muttered:

"There'll be a few less to blackguard me

the next time I go into Mulligan's Bend! I'm only sorry that Six-foot Si ain't on hand, to come in for his share."

He thus betrayed that he was playing upon sectional prejudice to glut his private revenge.

Had they been informed of this, it would have made no difference with his blood-thirsty followers. Murderers all, they enjoyed a keen huntsman's zest in shooting their fellows.

Ad Farley himself selected Joel Brinton, and at the second shot had the satisfaction of seeing him throw up his hands, flinging his revolver far over his head, and fall headlong to the ground.

Separating himself from the rout, he turned back, to gloat over his fallen enemy.

Joel Brinton fell so that he lay with his head lower than the rest of his body. The result was that the blood flowed into his brain by the force of gravity, and restored him to consciousness almost immediately.

The shock of the bullet had temporarily paralyzed the action of the heart; but in falling, his head fortunately had not struck with stunning force.

With that mistaken instinct which leads us to pillow the head high, he managed to change his position so as to rest his back against the gnarled roots of a tree.

This made him feel faint again; and he was on the point of losing consciousness again, when a startling event sent the thrill of renewed life through his veins.

He heard the tramp of a man and horse; and Ad Farley appeared before him, leading his animal, while he searched the ground for his fallen foe.

"Ah! there you are, curse you!" muttered the murderer. "Now we'll settle our little account!"

Farley thrust into his belt the revolver he was carrying, in readiness for any emergency. Seeing his victim apparently so helpless allayed his personal apprehensions; and he proceeded to give his demoniac cruelty free play.

Drawing his bowie-knife, he advanced with a sardonic grin, muttering:

"I've come to cut the heart out of you, my gay buck! The next ladies you call on of an evening will be in that delectable clime where there is no marrying nor giving in marriage!"

"Hah! you devil!" This sudden ejaculation was caused by an unwelcome surprise.

At the sound of approaching footsteps, where any comer was as likely to be an enemy as a friend, Joel Brinton had thrust his hand behind him and loosened his remaining revolver.

He knew that he had received a treacherous shot in the back; and the expression on Ad Farley's face was assurance enough that he owed it to him, and that he had now come to finish his fiendish work.

While the latter had the drop on him, it was hopeless to offer resistance; and instead of drawing his hand from behind him and revealing his weapon, Joel Brinton at once conceived the defense of cunning.

If he could dissuade Farley from an immediate execution of his purpose, he might throw him off his guard, and turn the tables on him.

What then was the satisfaction with which he saw the very savagery of the man play into his hands?

The moment he saw him exchange his revolver for his bowie, the intended victim knew that he was safe, if only he could retain his consciousness.

Fetching his weapon round to the front, he said, coolly:

"This seems to be a game at which two can play, my man! At your time of life, and with your past experience, you ought to have learned one infallible rule:—When pistols are trumps, never turn down the jack! By allowing me to make it, you have lost your point and thrown the game into my hands."

"Curse you! who and what are you? What do you know about such things?" snarled the baffled villain, stopping like a tiger arrested in the act of springing upon its prey.

He had taken Joel Brinton for a "tenderfoot," and here he was talking like a thoroughgoing mountainman. Where he had

looked for a "flat," he had "picked up a sharp?"

"Ho! my dear sir," laughed Joel Brinton, "I have lounged about the world, and picked up a point or two along the way.

"But that's neither here nor there. Come, sir! let's to business! About face!"

As he spoke, he exerted all his strength to make his hand steady, lifted his revolver deliberately, and closing one eye, drew a bead on his would-be murderer's heart.

Greatly impressed by this coolness and address, Ad Farley turned upon his heel with the promptness of a soldier on drill.

This unhesitating obedience did not, however, interfere with his grinding savage oaths of impotent rage between his teeth.

He was baffled. He knew that there was no use in leaping forward to meet a bullet.

"Fling that knife away, as far as you can throw it in a straight line!" ordered Joel Brinton, in as firm a voice as he could command.

The moment his enemy's eye was off of him, he had let his revolver-hand drop down into his lap. To his weakness it felt like a burden of lead.

Ad Farley, unconscious of this, cast the bowie from him.

"Curse you!" he snarled, "if your heart were only in line!"

"Now your revolvers, first one and then the other!" commanded Joel Brinton, not wasting his strength by bandying words.

Ad Farley hesitated.

"What do you propose to do with me?" he asked.

Without deigning to answer him, Joel Brinton began to count with a stern, deliberate implacability which evidently "meant business:"

"One!—two!—"

"Hold on! Don't shoot!" cried Farley, in a quavering tone which betrayed the real coward which lurked under his bullying manner.

Trembling, he threw his weapons away, as ordered.

"Now then," said Joel Brinton. "I am ready to answer your question. I purpose to take you a prisoner, if possible. As I can't do it alone in my present state, I shall summon assistance. It will be lucky for you, if it chances to not be one of your friends who answers to my call."

He thereupon fired his revolver into the air, and cried out:

"Help! Help! Help!"

This was the summons to which Beatrice responded with her heart on her lips.

The instant he heard her voice, Ad Farley reasoned out all in a flash one probable effect of her coming.

"She will divert his attention at least for an instant; and that's my chance!"

He looked round, and saw that, instead of being trained upon him, Joel Brinton's revolver lay in his lap in a relaxed grasp, while the man's head sagged as if he were on the point of lapsing again into unconsciousness.

The consciousness that he had been baffled by a man with so little real life in him stung him with unspeakable rage. He longed to spring upon him, and with his bare hands strangle the last spark of vitality out of his body. But it was too late. Close behind Beatrice came a horseman in whom he recognized the merciless Yellow Jack.

He knew that the *mestizo* had no particular reason to love him, and that his ruthless nature would probably prompt him to a revenge compared with which death by shooting would be merciful. So, with an oath of concentrated rage, he sprung away in flight.

Beatrice had but one thought. She cast herself down beside her guardian with clasped hands, crying piteously:

"Oh, uncle Joe! they have murdered you!"

He smiled upon her faintly, and tried to speak; but a deathly pallor overspread his countenance; and as she threw her arms about him, his head sunk upon her bosom.

Meanwhile, Yellow Jack was forecasting a contingency of the future. He saw in Ad Farley only an enemy who was escaping with the knowledge that he—Yellow Jack—was alone with the captive on his hands. He must kill him, or run the chance of having the whole force of the rescuers set upon his track.

He instantly spurred his horse in pursuit,

firing at the fugitive at every favorable opportunity.

But the ground was much broken, and the animal's progress was further impeded by the undergrowth into which the gambler plunged.

The result was that Ad Farley eventually escaped, though not without more than one desperate wound.

Yellow Jack was induced to abandon the pursuit the sooner, by the reflection that he was meanwhile giving his prisoner an opportunity to elude him.

Beatrice had the good sense to lower her guardian's head; and his ebbing consciousness revived, though he panted with the gasping breath of a wounded man.

"Oh, uncle Joe! uncle Joe!" she sobbed. "What can I do for you? You are not going to die, and leave me with the horror of having brought it upon you?"

"Hush! hush!" he whispered, hoarsely. "I'm not used up yet. I think the bullet must have glanced on a rib or the shoulder-blade. Otherwise I should have been a dead man before this. That villain shot me in the back. I thought he was on our side. It is the shock so close to the heart that makes me faint. Don't mind me. Fly, my dear, while you have the chance. Go! go!"

He pressed her hand feebly, as a sign of parting; but she never dreamed of such a thing as seeking her own safety through the abandonment of him.

"Oh! you do not think me so heartless as that?" she exclaimed. "Let me find your wound. I may be able to stanch the blood."

He was too faint to contest the matter; and she tenderly turned him over, and with his bowie cut a slit in the back of his coat and shirt, so that she could get at the wound.

While she was thus employed Yellow Jack returned.

"Come!" he cried, roughly, "we have no time to fool away patching up dead men! That fellow escaped, and will soon have a hornets' nest about our ears. It means death to you, my dear, if I see that I am about to fail in getting off with you."

"Do you fancy that I would leave this gentleman here in this wounded condition? I will not do it short of being dragged away by force!"

"We'll soon settle that," said the outlaw, callously. "I'll put him beyond the need of your care."

And drawing his revolver, he took deliberate aim at the helpless man's head.

With a scream Beatrice sprung before the weapon, so that its muzzle almost touched her bosom.

"Kill me!" she cried; "but you shall not harm him!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BITTER REQUITAL.

AD FARLEY was mortally wounded. He believed that thoroughly.

"But if I can keep in the saddle until I get home to my darling!" he gasped. "I have failed in everything. There is no hope of my going for Tiger Dick with this hole in me, letting my life out. But she'll know that I've done my best."

Dark spots floated before his eyes. He felt faint and sick. He raised his flask to his lips, and drank deep of the fiery spirits it contained. Then he set his teeth hard and rode on.

"If it only carries me to her feet!" he gasped. "That's all I ask in this life."

In all his infamous nature there was one spot where a tear of his guardian angel must have fallen. He loved the woman through whose incitement he had found his ruin.

Mile after mile his faithful horse bore him, while he reeled in the saddle and noted with hungry eyes every landmark which told that he was nearing home.

The night set in, but he kept on. He dared not stop.

"I shall never live to get into the saddle," he said to himself, "if I once get out of it. Give me strength! give me strength!"

He did not name even in thought the Power to which his last words were an appeal.

Who shall tell the thoughts that haunted his guilty brain, as he rode on through the

darkness with a dread upon him that he would never again see the morning light?

Midnight came and was left behind. Still he toiled on. His teeth were clinched. Great beads of icy sweat stood on his forehead. His eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets.

"Strength! strength! only strength!" he gasped.

So he rode into the camp. The lights were out. The nightly revel was done. The last besotted drunkard reeled off to the wretched hovel he called home. The last desperate gambler had reluctantly dragged himself from the lair of the tiger, cursing the cold announcement:

"Gentlemen, the game is done for tonight."

But his hungry eye saw one light. It was like a beacon welcoming him to the goal for which he had been making through all those agonized hours.

"She is anxious!" he said to himself, with a glow about his heart that repaid him for all the desperate fight he had made to reach her alive.

He pictured her waiting and fearing with pallid lips. And would she mourn him when he was dead?

"Let me die in her arms, with her tears on my face!" he pleaded.

He drew up before the house, steadied himself, and then dismounted with infinite pains. He had to cling to the pommel of his saddle, to keep from falling with the vertigo and faintness that came over him.

"I shall not fail!" he gasped, with parched lips. "I have come so far, I shall not fail here on the very threshold. I shall not fail! I shall not fail!"

He writhed and ground his teeth with a sudden anguish. That revived him for a moment.

His horse, which hung its head and sneezed faintly with exhaustion, turned and nibbled his leg feebly.

This mark of affection almost moved the man in his weakness to tears.

"Good fellow!" he murmured, and stopped to stroke the neck of the beast, with a sense of gratitude to which his callous heart was a stranger.

Then steadying himself, he turned toward the door.

It would have rejoiced him if she had come to meet him, but perhaps she had not heard the tread of his horse. She might have fallen asleep in the midst of her vigil.

He let himself in with a key which he always carried. He groped his way along the corridor, under one of the doors of which appeared a narrow line of light.

He gained the door, turned the knob, and crossed the threshold.

He was so nearly gone that he had to stop in the doorway, steadying himself like a groggy prize-fighter.

And this was the picture his dull eyes took in: the Golden Serpent standing in the curtained doorway leading into the next room, holding on the curtains with either hand.

What was there in her attitude that sent a spasmodic thrill through him, quickening him into new, if evanescent, life?

Was it the attitude of fear? Was it the attitude of detected guilt? What was behind her? What was she hiding from him?

It was a strange thing that she should have her mask on. Alone, why should she retain it?

Why did not she speak to him? Had she no welcome after all the agonizing strain of the past age-long hours? Why did she stand there and stare at him through the eye-holes of her mask, as if his coming had struck consternation to her heart?

"Pipa!"

His voice sounded strangely to himself. It had not the stern quality he willed to throw into it. Why, against his will, did it sound so weak and pleading?

The woman made no reply, but stood staring at him, as if carved in stone.

"Pipa, my dearest!" he whispered.

He extended one hand to her, keeping his balance with the other by clinging to the door-knob.

His eyes became humid, and something like a sob was in his voice.

He had not the strength to upbraid her, whatever she might be found guilty of. All he asked was that she ease his departure

through the dark gateway with some little show of tenderness.

There was no response. The only sign of life in her was her panting breath and the glitter of her eyes through the holes in her mask.

He knew that he could not stand there and wait much longer. He would soon drop in his tracks.

He longed to touch her—only to feel the warmth and life of her body. He let go his hold on the door and reeled across the room.

The woman became more and more agitated as he drew nearer to her. He could see her shrink and tremble.

"Pipa, my darling!" he aspirated, with his ebbing life.

He was within a pace or two of her. His hands were extended, only to grasp her dress as he fell at her feet.

With a sudden wolfish cry of rage, she sprung forward. Her hand was flung upward, drawing his eye after it by the flash of a polished blade in the lamplight. Then it descended like a stroke of lightning, her clinched fist striking his breast with a dull thud, and she leaped back, crouching in terror, and gripping a blood-ensanguined dagger in her trembling hand.

His arms dropped at his sides. He stood swaying and staring at her in dumb agony, a wondering reproach in his eyes that was beyond words.

"Pipa!" he whispered once again.

This persistent appeal seemed to enrage the woman.

Once more, with a cry of fury, she sprung upon him, and dealt one! two! three! lightning blows into his defenseless breast.

With his eyes wide open, fixed upon her in a stony stare, while the blue glaze of death passed over them like a film, he threw up his hands, and fell, without a sound, straight over backward, his head striking the floor like a stone.

"Good God!" exclaimed a hoarse, horrified voice.

The murderer looked up, and saw in the doorway a man whose dilated eyes, bloodless lips and distorted face showed how profoundly he was moved by the peculiar ghastliness of the scene.

With something like a roar of insane fury she sprung toward him, brandishing her blood-reeking knife.

Uttering a cry of terror, he fled before her with chattering teeth.

She rushed from the house, mounted the horse which still stood without, and sped away into the night toward Mulligan's Bend.

One of the many reckless traits of the Golden Serpent was, that, having got any one in a "fix," she left them to look out for themselves.

Persuaded against both judgment and feelings into acting as her substitute, the moment the transfer was beyond recall Giacomo began to curse his folly and forecast all sorts of mischances.

His especially weak point was his vanity; and being a little man, he had a little man's dread of doing anything that would seem to lessen his dignity.

To let it be known that he could so successfully masquerade as a woman, and a small woman, at that, would have been a blow to his self-importance from which he could never hope to recover.

The night passed without accident. He dealt the cards in silence, his croupier making the necessary calls of the game. No one had the least suspicion.

But the Golden Serpent did not return; and now he remembered that she had said nothing about the time of his release.

How was he to pass the next day, unable to speak to her servants without betraying himself?

He knew her well enough to assume that she was subject to fits of the sulks, wholly without discoverable reason; and he resolved to simulate one of these.

Keeping the mask on his face as a guard against surprise, he locked himself in her bedchamber, and was relieved to see that he was left free from intrusion, and that his meals were served at the proper time by servants who discreetly withdrew, leaving him to eat at his pleasure.

A second night in the gambling room passed as the first had done. But, his duties there over, he was so nervous with apprehen-

sion of the return of Ad Farley that he got no sleep.

The following day was one of misery. Cook found it necessary to consult "the missus," and tapped respectfully on the chamber door.

Keeping to his cue, Giacomo made no reply; and Cook went away muttering.

On the third night, as he was leaving the gambling room, his croupier addressed a question to him.

Simulating the petulance of a sulky vixen as best he could, he snubbed the man and flounced away, leaving him to such consolation as he could find in his choice vocabulary of profane swearing.

But this thing could not go on without awaking suspicion. Even such a little spitfire as the Golden Serpent could not sulk forever.

Giacomo was at a white heat with rage. What if the woman had taken it into her head to run away, and had left him as a dummy, to prevent suspicion until she had got beyond pursuit? She was equal to even such treachery.

He walked the floor that night, debating whether to "cut his lucky," or stay yet another day.

So Ad Farley came upon him. All was now up. Discovery was inevitable. In the bewilderment of his desperate strait he knew not how to act.

But as he saw the weakness of the man, who under ordinary circumstances could have picked him up and broken him across his knee, the thought flashed through his brain that, if he should kill him and fly, the odium of the murder would rest on the Golden Serpent, and he, on resuming his proper character, would be safe.

But with the purpose of murder came the murderer's savage hatred of his victim, fanned into a fiercer flame by a scathing contempt with which the weakness of the once powerful man inspired him. Added to this was rage at being forced into an act which might eventuate in the stretching of his precious neck!

This it was that made the fury of his attack.

So Ad Farley died, never suspecting that it was other than the Serpent who had struck her fangs into his vitals at the last.

Let us precede Giacomo to Mulligan's Bend by a day.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MARBLE HEART.

For two days 'Beth Crawford mourned beside her dead, approached only by Mrs. Dangerfield and Six-foot Si.

The others, though warm in their sympathy, were awed by the hard, unfeminine way in which she took her trouble, and dared not intrude upon her.

It got bruited about that she had sworn a fierce oath of vengeance; and Six-foot Si was so annoyed with questions that, but for his popularity, he would have provoked more than one fight by the roughness of his answers.

So the day of the funeral came, and with it a novel feature which added interest to the occasion.

Such a thing as a "gospel sharp" had never been seen at Mulligan's Bend. The nearest personage of that character was at a Framley City, a distance of fifty miles.

Six-foot Si went for him, saying to Mrs. Dangerfield:

"It's a mighty leetle that she'll have to make it seem like layin' away a human, an' that a—friend, ye understand."

The sympathetic woman read his secret, and joined heartily in his purpose, offering to sing a hymn.

"Ma'am," said Si, "ef you could do that—"

And there he broke down with feeling.

The boys washed and combed themselves for the occasion, and some few even tried to get the clay off of their boots. As for blacking, that was a quite different matter. What a "surprise party" it would have been to those cowhides!

So the last sad rites were as impressive as unfamiliar to the rough fellows who had left civilization behind them in their quest of the golden fleece.

Perhaps they were most affected by the sweet sadness of Mrs. Dangerfield's voice, as

she sung with so much feeling that the tears stood in her eyes.

But the chief mourner stood like a stone! Not a tear, not a tremor of her set features. She gazed into the open grave with hot, glittering eyes, as if even there steeling her heart, as she had said, for the ruthless blow of revenge.

When all was over, she turned away and walked back to the camp beside Mrs. Dangerfield, with her eyes set straight before her.

"Look hyar, gov'nor," said Si, addressing the minister—choosing that title as one of more than ordinary respect, and at a loss for any more appropriate—"the way as that pore critter is goin' on ain't right."

"She seems very hard and unwomanly," said the minister, who was a very young man, and had entirely mistaken 'Beth's manner.

Six-foot Si turned upon him with a blaze of concentrated fury that made him start aside with not a little apprehension.

"Boss," he said, throwing aside all forms, "you're a man o' God, I understand; but you're a *man* fur all that; an' no man that stands on two legs kin slander that woman without swallerin' me!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the divine.

"Nothing was further from my thoughts. And I did not know that you had any particular interest—"

"That's all right," said Si, as abruptly getting himself in hand. "I allow you didn't know no better. But that's neither hyer nor thar. What's got to be did, somehow, is to switch her off the track—the down grade, ye understand. Now you parsons has a way o' gittin' around women-folks that a tough like *me*, fur instance, couldn't swing nohow. The question is, kin *you* swing her?"

The divine looked rather surprised at Si's choice of expression.

"What do you wish me to do?" he asked.

"Waal, ye see, it ain't natural fur woman-kind to take things in this hyer way; an' ef so be you could do or say somethin' to soften her, ye understand."

"I will endeavor to show her the wickedness of hardening the heart against these messengers of Providence, sent in mercy to draw our hearts away from the sinful world to God."

Si scratched his head, and glanced somewhat dubiously out of the corner of his eye at the sedate face of the young divine.

"I allow," he said, hesitatingly, "as the wickedness that she'll be took up with most, is the wickedness o' that thar scalawag of a pard o' his'n. But ef so be you could give that the go-by, an' say somethin' to touch her feelin's an' make her cry, I reckon that would be about the thing. Ef I had the gift o' gab, which the Lord knows I hain't, I'd make bold to try my own hand."

Look and tone showed that he had not the fullest confidence in the minister's execution of the mission he sent him on. But he was his only resource, and in sheer helplessness he made his final appeal to him.

"Friend," he said, laying his hand on his shoulder, "that thar galoot has hurt her *bad*. Ye can't blame her fur that, bein's as how it was her sweetheart, the which she hadn't seen him fur a many years back. It's human nater to want to git squar'; but it ain't the thing fur to have her go to salivate him—an' she a woman, ye understand. That thar's men's work. An' she's took her Bible oath to come back at him, an' rub him out. That's what ye want to knock out of her head."

"You shock me!" exclaimed the minister, with a scandalized look. "Is it possible that—"

But, remembering the heat with which Si resented any reflection against the sorrow-maddened woman, he went on, with a lowered tone:

"I will see if she can be reached through prayer."

Si let him go, looking after him with a wistful sigh.

"I reckon, now," he said, reflectively, "he conceits as how he's savin' the Lord. Waal, he won't have the big-head so bad when he's older and knows more. Ten to one ef he don't do more harm than good. I know what I'll do. I'll try Iron Despard. He's knowledgible, he is."

And he betook himself to his own shanty, where the wounded duelist lay.

Resisting Mrs. Dangerfield's dissuasions,

'Beth had gone to the shanty whence the body of her murdered lover had just been borne.

Thither the minister followed her.

She received him courteously, yet coldly.

"My dear friend," he said, in a tone of professional sympathy, "I have come to pass a few minutes in prayer with you, if you will permit me."

She turned her hard eyes deliberately upon him, and asked:

"Can your prayers bring back the dead?"

The minister flushed scarlet.

"It is meet that we should pray for meekness to bear the afflictions that it pleases Heaven to send upon us, and for light to see or faith to believe in their mercifulness," he said, in a tone of reproof.

The girl turned her eyes away, and made no reply.

The minister was in a dilemma. He felt that an appeal to her to join him in prayer would be met with silent scorn. However, his sense of duty would not let him go away with his purpose unfulfilled.

After a moment's hesitation, he knelt and prayed alone, trusting to some supernatural influence to touch her heart.

With the best of intentions he prayed in such a manner as to cause her to set her teeth with a smile of bitter derision.

Presently he rose, addressed a few parting words to her, and turned to depart.

Then she spoke in a tone of ordinary courtesy.

"May I ask a favor of you, sir?"

"Anything I can do for you, madam."

"Oblige me by requesting Six-foot Si to call upon me here."

Si came in response to this summons, and saw that his worst fears had been realized. The woman's eye was like blue-tempered steel.

"Of whom can I learn all about this man, Moran?" she asked.

Six-foot Si saw a neat chance to carry out a scheme which he had arranged with Iron Despard.

"I reckon, ma'am," he replied, "thar don't nobody in this hyar camp know so much about him as Colonel Dangerfield."

"The gentleman who has been recently wounded in a duel?"

"That's him, ma'am."

"Is he in condition so that I can have an interview with him?"

"He'd see you ef he was twice as bad off."

"I shall be obliged to you if you will arrange a meeting immediately."

"You kin come right along with me now, ef you're ready."

"The sooner the better; there will be the less time for my hate to cool!"

Si looked at her piteously, but said nothing.

They found Iron Despard alone, lying comfortably among pillows which his wife's loving skill had made of mountain-moss.

Si opened the door, let 'Beth pass in, and then closed it softly.

Then he hung about the outside of the shanty in painful suspense.

"Pray, be seated, madam," said Iron Despard, indicating a rude chair fashioned out of a packing-box, which stood close beside the bunk. "I understand that—"

"I fear that I shall tax your strength," she said, deprecatingly.

"I am quite comfortable, thank you. If I can be of service to you, I shall count it a pleasure."

"I have come to ask you about the murderer, Joe Moran. I wish to know him when I see him. Can you describe him? Is there any distinguishing mark by which I may be certain of his identity?"

"I will describe him to you. But first, will you pardon me if I venture a word of counsel?"

"I will listen to anything you wish to say."

"May I ask why you are so earnestly seeking to know him?"

"I mean to avenge his victim, and I wish the blow to fall like a thunderbolt!"

"Have you paused to think that this is little in keeping with your sex?"

"I have done with such trifles, sir! Do you suppose that the two days I have spent counting the wounds on Robert Cady's body have been a good schooling in womanliness?"

Their livid lips have whispered to me but one word—revenge!"

"I have heard of your resolve in this matter, and had you not come to me, it was my intention to send for you. Will you listen to me patiently for a few minutes?"

"Certainly, save that I warn you of the futility of trying to dissuade me from my purpose."

"I wish to give you the benefit of an experience of my own within the past four days."

And thereupon Iron Despard recounted the darkest episode of his life, the particulars of which, if the reader cares to follow them, may be found in No. 299 of the Dime Library, entitled "Three of a Kind, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard, and the Sportive Sport."

With a vividness born of the storm of passion that had so recently swept over him, he told how he had been overwhelmed in the bitter waters of hate; how, while the madness was upon him, he had spurned every claim of humanity; how Dead Sea fruit had sprung from this fatal sowing; and how, in the end, his eyes had been opened.

"The net result of what I have passed through," he said, in conclusion, "is this: Revenge is the most fatal mistake in life! Will you believe me? If you succeed in wreaking it, you will give to your life a bitterness which nothing ever afterward can sweeten. If you fail—that is your one chance of learning at less cost how revenge defeats itself. Fresh from this quagmire myself, I beseech you not to plunge into it! I have come out of it to thank God for failure. It may be your lot to kneel in hopeless penitence all the days of your life, in the shadow of a damning success."

He had pleaded with passionate earnestness. The woman sat through it in stony immobility.

"I can appreciate the kindness of your purpose," she said, when he was done; "but I stand by my resolve. For the privilege of thrusting with my own hand this coward, this traitor down into hell which is his proper home, I will cheerfully pay whatever penalty an offended God may exact!"

"Then may Heaven help you!" said Iron Despard, solemnly. "I have seen this war of hatred among men, until from familiarity it has come to seem a natural feature of life. To-day your sex has revealed it to me in its true hideousness."

"Why should not a woman revenge her wrongs as well as a man?"

"There is no valid reason. It is only that from habit we expect something different from you of the gentler sex."

"Well, I, for one, have done with gentleness! Now show me the mark at which I am to strike!"

It was plain that she was beyond the reach of argument. She must run her course, and make or mar her fate, as we all do.

Iron Despard put her in possession of all the facts necessary to the prosecution of her purpose.

To the understanding of his story only this much is necessary:—Joe Moran had murdered his partner to gain possession of a cryptogram, or writing in cipher, which told the location of a rich "lode" far away in the mountain fastnesses. Having associated with himself two of the best men in all that region, Iron Despard had regained the cryptogram—in the interests of its rightful owner, if he survived, and, if not, for the behoof of his sweetheart or other heirs—only to lose it again through his own madness. The irresistible "team"—"Three of a Kind"—was broken up, and he lay almost at the gate of death.

The woman passed out of his presence with her implacable purpose in her hard face.

The moment Six-foot Si saw her he knew that Iron Despard had failed.

"Ye couldn't fetch her, colonel?" he said dejectedly.

"No. Nothing can shake her iron will."

"That settles it, then!"

"What do you mean?"

"I've made up my mind what I'm goin' to do!"

And Six foot Si straightened himself up, his face lighting with a new purpose.

"May I ask what it is?"

"You'll see, when it's done! Good-by, pard. I wouldn't leave ye ef I hadn't such a

loud call. But you jest use this hyar shanty as ef it was your own, while I'm gone."

"You're going away?"

"An' hain't got no time to spare! I'm a fool that I didn't see it all, an' set out two days ago."

"Si!"

"Colonel!"

"I guess what—"

"Waal, that's all right; but don't give it away!"

And the giant strode through the door out into the street.

An hour later 'Beth Crawford asked for him, for a last word.

Be was nowhere to be found, nor did any one know of his departure save Iron Despard.

"Then," she said, "I must have recourse to this prisoner, Tiger Dick."

CHAPTER XXV.

TEE BOSS.

THE Daisy, at peace with himself and all the world, stood picking his teeth before the Mountain House.

On the opposite side of the street he saw a callow lout, with his mouth agape and his face broadened by a silly grin of admiration, staring at Beth Crawford, who was approaching.

"Cheese it, cully!" called the Daisy.

The fellow started as if caught in some guilty act, and hanging his head sheepishly, shambled off.

"I'll be hanged ef that thar beauty hain't knocked this camp silly!" mused the Daisy. "From Six-foot Si to that yokel—and even yer humble servent, by Jove!—she's hit 'em all whar they live! And Yokum?—Yokum, he's caved like a landslide, he has! It's a dog-gone shame that she's so gone on that thar stiff. Thar hain't no more good in him; then he ought to give some better man a show."

However peculiar his notion of the transfer of affection, the Daisy was not wanting in courtesy.

Off came his hat with a grand salaam, and he stood deferentially for the lady to pass.

What was his surprise and delight when she stopped and addressed him.

"My indebtedness to you for one courtesy, sir," she said, "emboldens me to seek another."

"Madam," replied the Daisy, "to say that you do me proud by thinkin' me worthy to wait on ye, would be drawin' it mild!"

"Thank you, sir! If I tax your kindness too far—"

"Cut it short right thar, ma'am, ef you please! Whatever I kin do, you can pile yer chips on."

"I was about to ask your aid in securing an interview with Tiger Dick."

"Excuse me, ma'am! but you've floored me the fu'st round!"

"You are unwilling—"

"Make it unable, an' you'll call the best I've got."

"I know that he is Sheriff Farnsworth's prisoner; but I thought that you might use your influence—"

"The which I'd be only too happy, ef so be the boys was as anxious to foller my lead as I am to play to your hand, ma'am. But bein's as I takes their money, they sours on me more or less—rather more than less, ye understand. But thar's Six-foot Si, now—"

"Who, unfortunately, has left the camp."

"Sho! Jest look a' that, fur some men's luck! You may have the sand and the savvy; but ef the run o' the keerds is ag'in' ye, up goes yer sugar!"

"Is there no one else of sufficient authority—"

"Yokum! Yokum's yer man, ma'am. When Si pulls out, Yokum calls the house."

"And he is to be found—"

"Right hyar, ef you'll wait tell I trot him out."

"I shall be obliged to you."

"Don't mention it!"

And having shown the lady into the tavern, the Daisy went in quest of the "second best" man in the camp.

He found Yokum thigh-deep in mud and water, one of a party engaged in turning the current of a mountain run into another channel, to get at the auriferous sand in its bed.

"Hello, old man!" he hailed. "Come out o' that."

"Me?" asked Yokum, ungrammatically.

"Yes, you. You're wanted, an' mighty quick, too."

"What's the row?" asked Yokum, beginning to wade ashore.

"It's a petticoat requisition."

"The deuce ye say! Then I allow you've served yer papers on the wrong party."

"Not much! You don't know what a rushin' feller you air with the ladies."

"A rushin' nothin'! I say, Daisy—I'll maul you, ef you've got me out o' hyar on some tom-fool errand."

His fellows in the stream were leaning on their implements, grinning in expectation of some "sell."

"Ye can't go a-sparkin' in that rig, pard," cried one of them, referring to his long rubber boots, the legs of which were sustained by a piece of rope going over one shoulder.

"Ef ye want some b'ar's grease fur yer ha'r," another shouted after him, "ye'll find some in Mart's shanty, what he was swabbin' his brogans with."

"Look at the man blush!" laughed a third.

And a general guffaw went round.

"You blatherskites, dry up!" retorted Yokum, who was conscious that his agitation was altogether too plain to be seen.

"Confound you, Daisy! I'll kill you, sure—"

"I tell you, man, the thing's square!" protested the Daisy. "Don't you suppose I've got better business on my hands than to come hyar guyin' you?"

"Who is it, pard?"

"Miss Crawford."

"Miss Nonsense!" cried Yokum—as near as we can report his more forcible expression.

But he blushed crimson with delight, and instantly looked down at his dress.

"I'm in nice shape to see a lady, ain't I?" he said, with disgust.

"Hang yer looks!" cried the Daisy.

"That'll do fur a business call. When you git the chance to set out some better looking feller as company, it'll be time to talk."

"You be blowed!" retorted Yokum, striding toward his shanty with the fixed determination to improve his appearance in honor of the occasion. "What does she want of me?"

"She wants to see Tiger Dick; an' I told her as how you was the gent to hand her in with a swing, guards or no guards."

"You bet I bel!" cried Yokum, thrusting forward his breast with a pugnacious swagger.

"But whar's Si!"

"I'll never tell ye."

"I'll owe you one, all the same, Daisy, fur givin' me this boost."

"Don't furgit it when I'm broke!" laughed Daisy.

"Tiger Dick!" muttered Yokum, with a discontented frown. "I wonder what call she has along o' him."

The Daisy chuckled with keen relish.

"You're a mighty hard man to suit," he said. "Hyar you've found somethin' to growl at a ready. Come to think, though, ef I was you, I'll be blowed ef I'd spruce up to take a woman to another man—an' such a darling as the Tiger!"

"You go hang!"

And Yokum kept on to his shanty, substituted a pair of leather boots for his rubber ones, washed the clay from his hands and face, and otherwise renovated his person, so that he presented himself before the lady "in very good shape."

"Yer servent, ma'am!"

Beth made her wishes known; and Yokum took her in charge with the air of a man who had but to speak to be obeyed.

He conducted her to a shanty before which lounged a group of men in nowise differing from the miners who were to be seen using pick and shovel, and rocking cradles in all directions.

They were whiling the idleness of guard duty with cards and dice.

Yokum expected to find the Tiger among his guards; but he was not to be seen.

"Who's runnin' this hyar?" he demanded.

"That means me," replied one of the group in no way distinguishable from his fellows.

"Waal, Matt Bourne, whar's Tiger Dick?"

"In yon," replied the captain of the

guards, carelessly pointing with his thumb over his shoulder at the shanty door.

"Do you mean to say that you've got him cooped up in that box?"

"Thar's whar he is, boss."

"An' why ain't he out hyar, enjoyin' of himself along o' the rest o' ye?"

"It's his own notion. I reckon he likes it better in thar by himself."

"Waal, this hyar lady is wantin' fur to see him."

"All right, ma'am. I allow it won't hurt none jest fur to look at him."

"You don't drop to me. The lady wants to talk with him."

"Sorry, ma'am; but that's ag'in' orders."

"Hey?" shouted Yokum, with sudden anger, thrusting his face close to that of the captain of the guard.

Matt drew back, surprised.

"Ef that don't suit you," he said, slowly, "take it out o' Farnsworth, when he comes back. I'm obeyin' orders, I am."

"Whose orders?" demanded Yokum.

"Jim Farnsworth's orders."

"Jim Farnsworth's orders, hey? Waal, do you allow as Jim Farnsworth runs this hyar camp?"

"I allow as he runs the prisoner, boss."

"He does, does he? Waal, we'll see how much he runs him in Mulligan's Bend! Take a look at me, boss! Look me over well!"

"All right. I see you."

"Waal, now hearken to me! I'll give you jest a minute an' a half to make up yer mind who's cock o' the walk in this hyar camp!"

Yokum planted his fists on his hips, and thrust forward his chin.

Matt saw that the case was more serious than he had anticipated.

"What do you mean?" he asked, guardedly.

"I mean that fur two cents I'd tear you out hyar, an' throw yer whole concern into the drink yonder!"

"You've got the backin' to do it?"

"Waal! I should smile!"

Matt balanced the situation in his mind a moment, and then said:

"What does the lady want with the Tiger?"

"That's none o' your business!"

The captain of the guard flushed, but did not resent the insult openly.

Yokum saw that he "had" him.

"The lady ain't to take nothin' in to the prisoner," he began.

But ignoring him, Yokum turned to 'Beth, and said:

"Madam, ef you'll be pleased to walk in!"

Without a word further 'Beth walked through the guard, entered the shanty, and closed the door behind her.

"I ain't a-fightin' the hull camp," said the captain of the guard, by way of apology for his submission.

"Thar's whar ye show that you're a man o' sense," replied Yokum, coolly.

Meanwhile, what was 'Beth's business with Tiger Dick?

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FRUITLESS NEGOTIATION.

TIGER DICK had been overwhelmed by the last buffet of fate.

While the woman he loved more than life was menaced by a peril worse than death, he was sat helpless. She had called to him; he was powerless to respond!

Beth found him with his elbows on his knees and his hands clutched in his hair, his wrists yet linked together by handcuffs.

He did not look up at her entrance.

She stood regarding him in silence for a time. This bowed man was the very antipodes of what she sought.

But a touch of the magic wand of liberty might transform him again.

"This is Tiger Dick, is it not?" she presently asked.

At the sound of her voice he not only lifted his head, but rose to his feet, with the unvarying deference paid to women in the far West.

His face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot. He was the picture of heartbroken despair.

"Pray be seated, madam," he said, in a deep, hollow voice, offering her the box from which he had risen. "How can I serve you?"

'Beth looked at him narrowly, as if measuring the man.

"I know you by reputation," she said; "and on the strength of that I have sought you to ask your aid."

Tiger Dick smiled bitterly.

"My aid!" he echoed. "Is it possible that any one can look to me for help, and I in so sore need of help myself?"

"But you are not the indomitable Tiger that men have pictured with an involuntary admiration born of fear."

"No! no! I am like one of those caged and drugged and claw-pared beasts that are paraded in menageries, by some bespangled mountebank who poses as a hero before timid women and children!"

"But, as with them, it needs but freedom to restore the old monarch of the jungle."

"Freedom! If it ever come to me again, I shall curse it. It will come too late!"

"Listen to me. If you will, I'll bring you not only liberty, but employment which will reinfuse the fiery spirit that seems to have been crushed out of you."

"Gieye me liberty!" cried the Tiger, with a sudden rousing that showed that his better man was only slumbering, not dead, "and I will find employment of my own which will fill my veins with lava!"

He stood with clinched hands, quivering nostrils, and blazing eyes.

He was thinking of Yellow Jack.

'Beth's eyes seemed to take fire from his.

"This is the man I have come to find!" she cried.

But even as she spoke he settled back into the old attitude of despair.

"Too late! too late!" he muttered to himself.

The woman sprung forward and caught him by the arm.

"Rouse you!" she cried. "I know nothing of the blow that has fallen upon you; but I have wrongs that shame the mute heavens!"

The Tiger laughed with bitter scorn.

"The heavens are always mute!" he said.

"Yes," she responded, "if we lie prone, beseeching a justice that never comes till we wrench it from the reluctant grip of fate! Look at me! I would have a hand that can strike swift and sure, like the spring of the deadly cobra. Instead of that, I am cursed with my woman's weakness. How can I cope with this devil who has despoiled me of all that makes life of value? Yet, alone if need be, I will hunt him to the verge of the nether pit, and hurl him over!"

"But one false step may betray me into his power, or warn him beyond my reach. I fear, not instability of purpose, but my weakness, my ignorance; while with your counsel to guide me I should feel my resources multiplied tenfold."

The fiery passion of the woman roused the Tiger. He gazed at her in wonder. She stood before him like some Amazon queen driven to bay.

"How could you release me?" he asked.

"How have I gained access to you against the orders of Sheriff Farnsworth?" she responded.

"Is it against his orders?"

"So said your jailer."

"And yet you won him to disobedience. How?"

The girl flared out with fierce scorn.

"How do women gain anything?" she cried. "By finesse! Pah! it is all paltry lying, or deception in some form. Nothing can be done openly, directly, unless the arm is nerved with man's strength."

"But in this case?"

"As in all others. We puff up the vanity of one man, and then pit him against his fellows."

"And so you have molded this Six-foot Si to your will, I suppose."

"No. It is one who, in his absence, seems to wield almost equal power. They call him Yokum."

"But does he know your purpose?"

The woman laughed sarcastically.

"Do you take your tools into your confidence?" she asked.

The Tiger read the woman's face with a curious scrutiny.

She flushed under his gaze.

"You think that I have cast aside all honor and womanly self-respect, and descended to the common trickery of rogues," she said. "Well, I have!"

"And what is your justification? You seem to have justified yourself to yourself."

"Yes. It is this—I find myself among a pack of human wolves, and I propose to fight them in their own animal fashion."

"Who are you; and what is your cause?"

"I am the widow of Robert Cady—"

"His widow? I thought—"

"Lacking only the sanction of law. We have been one in heart these many years. From this on, I am only his avenger! I owe you something already. I have been told that you were one of the trio who undertook to redress his wrongs."

"We failed only through discord among ourselves."

"I have learned all that from the lips of Iron Despard. It is because of your share in the enterprise that I have come to you now."

"But all is changed since then. Then I was ready to fly to any excitement, to escape a haunting memory. Now a voice is calling me that I would give my soul to respond to!"

He was up and pacing the room now, like the caged tiger he had compared himself to.

Suddenly he turned and held out his manacled hands toward her.

"Can you strike these accursed shackles off of my wrists?" he asked.

"I can do anything to accomplish my purpose," she replied.

"Do this for me, give me time to strike one blow to the heart of a fiend, and I will devote the rest of my life, if need be, to your revenge!"

"Help me, and you shall then be free to pursue your own ends."

"But my exigency is pressing. It cannot wait. Even now it may be too late."

"And do you think I could sit with folded hands, waiting for you, while the blood of my Robert was crying to Heaven, and his murderer yet lived?"

"Listen! listen!" pleaded the Tiger, passionately.

And he poured the story of Beatrice's peril into 'Beth's cold ears.

"A day, an hour, may make or mar her happiness forever!" he concluded.

"With you, or without you, I set out on my mission this night!" said the woman, stonily.

The Tiger looked at her, and saw that she was immovable.

"So be it!" he said, and went and sat down on the edge of his bunk.

"You refuse?" she asked.

He did not answer her. He did not look up at her. The old cloud of despair enveloped him, as when she had entered.

She turned and walked out of the shanty without a word further.

"Enough!" she muttered to herself. "My hand alone!"

Without, Yokum yet waited.

"Waal, ma'am?" he said.

"I am obliged to you, and to these gentlemen. Good-afternoon!"

And she walked away, leaving Yokum to stare after her blankly.

He turned to find the guards smiling covertly at his discomfiture, and with a muted oath took himself off.

At sundown, Mrs. Dangerfield went with neighborly kindness to invite 'Beth to take tea with her.

The girl had already set out on her mission of retaliation.

In his prison, Tiger Dick sat in solitary despair. He could hear his guards without wrangling over their cards, or laughing at one another's attempts at wit.

From time to time he fell into a fitful doze, only to be haunted by the most horrible dreams, in which Beatrice and her persecutor, the infamous Yellow Jack, were ever present.

Now the girl was fleeing before him with wild eyes and streaming hair, her arms outreached to Dick for succor, her bloodless lips striving to articulate his name. Now she struggled in the embrace of the laughing fiend, with the vain flutterings of a helpless bird. At another time he could only see her face, with an expression of deathless woe upon it.

Suddenly he started out of a moment of dreamless oblivion into complete wakefulness.

There was a strange feeling of expectancy

upon him, as if something of tremendous moment were impending. Every nerve was aquiver with excitement, and beads of icy sweat seemed to ooze from every pore.

Above all, a deathlike hush bated his very breath.

Without the shanty, not a sound came from his guards. The dim light streaming in through the window of his prison chamber showed that the fire about which they were grouped had burned low.

No doubt it was far into the night, and they had fallen asleep, all but one or two left to watch.

This flashed through Tiger Dick's mind at the instant of his waking. At the same instant came the refutation of at least a part of his theory. The silence without was not due to the fact of his guards having gone to sleep on their post.

"Gentlemen," said a low voice, which electrified him strangely, he knew not why, "not a word!—not a sound!"

That was all he heard; yet it set his heart to beating with a wild elation. He bounded to his feet, and then stood waiting, quivering in every nerve.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A BARGAIN.

THROUGH one night the guard had watched on the *qui vive* for some desperate effort of their formidable prisoner to escape, or an attempt at rescue by his friends.

Between darkness and daylight nothing had happened.

"Boys," said their captain, with a well-satisfied air, "wind is cheap; but I allow that Tiger Dick in handcuffs is about like any other man in the same fix!"

The natural result was a relaxation of vigilance on this second night.

After all the camp was asleep, the guard got to gambling, with only a trifling stake, "just to make the game interesting."

But presently, with a challenging laugh, one of the players "chipped in" in a way that "meant business."

Another promptly "saw him and went better."

The remaining players "passed out" and the two "bullies" had the game between them.

Now began a test of nerve. The men bet alternately, watching each other like hawks.

No man present could be expected to resist the fascination of such a struggle. In a moment everything else was forgotten.

While all the guard were gathered around, alternately bantering the players, they were roused from their absorption by a low voice startlingly close at hand.

"Gentlemen, not a word!—not a sound!"

With suppressed ejaculations the men leaped up, dropping their cards and snatching instinctively at their fire-arms.

They were confronted by a circle of masked men, who might have started up out of the ground, so abruptly had they appeared on the scene.

Each of the assailants held a leveled revolver in either hand.

"Gently!" cautioned their leader. "We don't want no row, ef we kin help it."

"Who are you?" gasped Matt Bourne; "an' what do ye want?"

"We're the bosses o' this hyar lay-out, Cap; an' we're after Tiger Dick!"

The captain of the guard stared in mute dismay.

"Take it easy, boys!" laughed the other leader. "This hyar's only a leetle surprise-party. Ef you drop to us harsome, we'll let ye out in good shape; but ef ye kick—why, then it'll be yer own fault."

"I ain't sich a hog but I know that four aces takes the pot," said Matt.

"That's hoss-sense, boss. Boys, truss 'em up easy."

In a twinkling the guard were disarmed, bound and gagged.

Then they were led into the shanty.

"Who are you, boys?" asked the Tiger, as the men thronged into his prison.

"You'll find that out soon enough, Cap," said a man whose voice he did not recognize. "We *may* be friends; and then ag'in we *may* be takin' ye out to give ye a dancin' lesson. It won't do to let Frisco git away with Mulligan's Bend, ye understand."

Tiger Dick saw the grim force of this speech. He had more than one enemy in

that section of country; and the chances were that they were lynchers rather than liberators.

He looked at their dress narrowly, but could make nothing of it.

"What if they are Yellow Jack's men?" he said to himself.

However, friends or foes, he was equally in their power; so with no uneasiness in his face, he awaited their pleasure.

The guard were tied so that they could not get at and assist one another. Then they were left in possession of the shanty, while Tiger Dick was marched out in the midst of the maskers.

Like phantoms they stole out of the sleeping camp, to find a group of horses at such a distance that the restless movements of the animals would not betray their presence.

Here the Tiger, his wrists yet confined by the handcuffs, was mounted on a led horse, and the party moved cautiously away.

"This secrecy proves that they are not residents of the Bend," he reflected, on the alert for something to indicate the identity of his guides. "Moreover, we are not going in the direction of Coyote—from which I gather that it is not a public demonstration of that place. My private enemies are—first this Moran; but he is probably satisfied to escape; second, Adam Farley, an ugly customer, capable of anything to compass his revenge; and lastly, Yellow Jack. It was the mistake of my life, to let him go when I had him in my grip. But I was sick of blood; and then, he was her cousin, whatever else he might be."

Meanwhile he kept a vigilant lookout on the route they were following. Every step confirmed his suspicion that he was in the power of the vindictive *mestizo*. They were penetrating deeper and deeper into the mountain fastnesses.

The east was just beginning to glow with the first gray harbinger of morning, when they came to a bivouac in a pine-draped glen.

"Hyar we air, gents," said the leader, as he threw himself from his horse's back.

"An' you've fetched yer bird," said one of the men whom their coming had roused from sleep around the dying embers of a campfire.

"You bet yer boots! Now my share is done. I pass him over to the boss."

Tiger Dick looked for "the boss" among the men who crowded around to see him; but the man thus designated proved to be one who had taken part in his capture.

"That means me," said a voice which the Tiger instantly recognized; and the removal of a mask discovered Joe Moran.

"I'm glad that it came in my way to pull you out of a dirty hole," he said to the Tiger, pleasantly.

"Ah?" replied Dick, noncommittally.

"Let us begin by knocking off this jewelry,"—indicating the handcuffs.

"I shall be obliged to you for so much, at any rate."

"Oh! I count on our becoming fu'st-class friends, before we part company."

To this "feeler" Tiger Dick made no reply, as he watched the process of freeing him from the shackles of the law.

"Set down hyar by the fire, an' take a pull at the comforter."

And his host passed him the bottle.

Dick accepted this hospitality, waiting curiously for coming developments.

What did this rascal want of him?

"Pardner," began Moran, "I thought you looked mighty down in the mouth, in that thar bull-pen."

"Did I?" asked the Tiger.

"I reckon ye had reason to."

"Some might think so, perhaps."

"It was a hangin' matter, wasn't it?"

"Possibly."

"An' Jim Farnsworth has a mighty tight grip?"

"Does this look like it?"

"Oh, waal! ye don't git such a lift as this hyar every day."

"M-m, no."

"Ef, instid of assistin', I had left ye to play yer own hand, whar would ye have been?"

"In Mulligan's Bend yet, I fancy."

"You bet ye would! An' from thar you'd 'a' gone to Frisco, an' from Frisco straight to—"

"Hold on!" interrupted the Tiger. "You can't find the place you're thinking of on the map."

Moran laughed.

"You bet I ain't huntin' the road to it!" he said.

"It won't be necessary," replied the Tiger, "you can't miss it."

"That may be all so, boss. But, anyway, I propose to ride in my own carriage—you bet yer life on that!"

"I have no objections. Meanwhile, what do you want with me?"

"I want you to go along."

"Excuse me! I can get better company."

"I'll be hanged ef you kin!—not fur a part o' the way, anyhow."

"Come! come! show your hand. What are you after?"

"Jest step this hyar way, pard. When a man's talkin' business, he don't want no gawpin' an' no pickin' up of everythin' as he lets drop before it reaches the ground."

Moran rose and led the way from the fire beyond the hearing of his fellows.

Tiger Dick followed him, wondering what proposition was coming.

As he felt that he was free—free at least from bodily trammels—and passing out from the midst of his enemies, he glanced quickly yet furtively around.

By one of his lightning swoops, he might bear down upon this man, snatch his arms from him, and then spring away, once more facing the world.

"But he wouldn't be fool enough to lay himself open to that," reflected the Tiger. "He's got a double half-hitch on me somewhere."

And Moran's next words confirmed this view.

He did not see anything furtive in the Tiger's manner, but the hope of escape was so natural, that he provided against the attempt.

"Boss," he said, "it won't do no good to try to down me an' cut yer lucky. You could never git out o' this hyar pocket alive."

"I thought you had come out here to talk business," said the Tiger, coldly.

"Hyar's fur it, then. You know, boss, that I've got Bob Cady's blind."

"The cipher map of the secret lode. Very well."

"An' you know that it's worth somethin'."

"That remains to be seen."

"Anyway, you an' your crowd was willin' to put up a purty considerable stake on it, an' it's worth as much now as it was three days ago."

"No doubt."

"Waal, so fur, so good! Now, it don't take a very long head at 'rethmetic to make out that the more you let into a thing, the less thar is in it fur each one. Ef you've ever eat pie with a lot o' chums, you know that."

"Granted."

"But a man can't swing a big thing like this hyar all alone. It's resky, an' don't ye furgit it! Thar's galoots in this hyar pocket now that's watchin' of me like hawks. I know that. They'd jest jump out o' their socks fur the chance to crack me on the head an' make off with the blind. Jest now they think I'm goin' to let 'em all into it. That's whar they fool theirselves! I had to promise 'em that to git 'em; but promisin' an' payin' ain't quite the same thing. I want one good man—that's what I want. I want a man what's sprin' chain-lightnin' an' ain't afraid o' the devil. You're the only man I know that comes up to the mark. Hyar's what I offer ye—half the work an' half the plunder. Pullin' yer neck out o' the halter, Jim Farnsworth, was gittin' ready fur it—is throwed in gratis. Come! what do you say?"

"I say—take me back to Mulligan's Bend and put me again into the shanty where you found me," was Tiger Dick's prompt and unequivocal reply.

"Eh?"

Joe Moran stared in puzzled astonishment.

"It seems that I'm not as great a rascal as you took me to be," said the Tiger, coolly.

"Waal, I allowed as how a man would do almost anythin' to save his life."

"This is one of the things that some men wouldn't do. I prefer to take my chances with Jim Farnsworth."

"But, boss, you're a leetle out in yer reckonin'."

"In what respect?"

"We ain't takin' ye back to Jim Farnsworth, ye understand."

"What do you propose to do with me, then?"

"Do you see that thar tree yonder?"

"Yes."

"Waal, that thar's a deuced sight handier than Mulligan's Bend; an' I, fur one, hain't got no time to fool away!"

"You will hang me, then?"

"I'd hate to sp'ile so good a man. I'd rather make a pard of ye."

"Thanks—with regrets!"

"Do you mean to say that you'd rather be hung up to dry in this hyar gulch, than go snooks with me in that mine?"

"As strange as it seems to appear to you, I do."

"Waal, you beat my time; an' that's flat! But, look a-hyar, pard! I ain't done yit."

"Indeed! What inducement have you to offer greater than my life?"

"Boss, thar's a woman in it!"

Tiger Dick started.

"Ah!" triumphantly cried Moran, who had been watching him. "I've hit you whar ye live now!"

"What do you mean?" demanded the Tiger, with an ugly gleam of resentment in his eyes.

"I mean that I've got the men as kin knock the socks off'n Yaller Jack, *every time!* Hey—y—y? wha' do ye say?"

Joe Moran thrust his face forward, and looked the Tiger in the eye, with a confident leer.

All in a flash Tiger Dick's manner had undergone a complete transformation. He was now trembling visibly; his face turned deadly pale; and his breast heaved with deep emotion.

"Say that again, and say it slow," he said, holding himself in restraint.

"I will put my men in your hands to git the gal back, ef you will swear afterward to go cahoots with me in this hyar mine business. We shake the men, ye understand; an' you an' me rakes the board between us."

"I am to get the lady first? We shall set out now, instantly?"

"Yes."

"Done!"

And the Tiger extended his hand.

Joe Moran caught it with a grin of triumph.

"So help you God, an' by the bones of yer mother!" he cried.

"So help me God, and by the bones of my mother!" repeated Dick.

"No gig back?"

"Short of your death or mine."

"Hold on, pard! You're not to kill me, nor put any one else up to it? You swear to stan' by me through thick an' thin, in everythin' that one pard has a right to expect from another?"

"Yes, I swear all that. Come! we are losing time! Transfer the command over to me at once."

And the Tiger walked rapidly back toward the bivouac.

Moran kept pace with him, trembling between confidence and doubt of the wisdom of what he had undertaken to do.

They found the men busy preparing breakfast.

"Boys," said Moran, "I bring ye a fightin' man, as his quality is known to most o' ye. You know what's been talked of ef we could git him. You takes yer orders from him tell I say no! Boom him, boys! Three cheers and a hummer fur Tiger Dick!"

They made the welkin ring.

Then the Tiger spoke short and sharp—that ringing command which fires the soldier with confidence and enthusiasm.

In a moment every one was in action, breaking camp.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TIGER DICK TO THE RESCUE!

It was a part of Ad Farley's purpose to put the Frisco detective out of the way of standing between his revenge and Tiger Dick.

But fortune was against the man selected to drop him out of his saddle. His act of treachery was detected by one of the party from Mulligan's Bend.

Even in the midst of the fight with the outlaws, sectional hate took precedence.

"Boys!" he shouted, "these hounds from Coyote have wrung in a cold deal on us. They are shootin' us in the back! The Cap is down, an' Baldy knocked under up yon. Then thar's Sam Lacy, an' Dutch Jake, an' Spider-legs—all rubbed out by these sneak-in' cusses! Charge 'em! Don't leave nothin' but a grease-spot to tell the tale!"

Then rose a yell of fury, and in a twinkling the two parties were fighting tooth and nail among themselves, to the utter disregard of the common foe.

Goaded beyond endurance, the men of Mulligan's Bend fought like demons, and were soon driving their treacherous allies before them.

In Yellow Jack's party, second in authority to himself, was one Gopher Charley, a long-headed and cool-witted Yankee cowboy.

He was quick to note the turn matters had taken, and to avail himself of the advantage thus gained.

Rallying his men, he charged the contending denizens of the rival camps, and succeeded in running them into a little bay among the cliffs, from which there was no avenue of escape except the gulch through which they had entered.

In their blind feud against each other, they fought on, while Yellow Jack's men picked them off from either party indiscriminately.

But there came a sudden interruption to this sport. The outlaws found themselves sharply assailed by a new foe in the rear. Then ensued the wildest confusion.

The new-comer was Tiger Dick, at the head of Joe Moran's men.

He simply "gobbled up" the *mestizo's* band.

Within the pocket the rival camps fought on, with a fair prospect of mutual annihilation.

Absorbed in the one quest of his heart, Tiger Dick was indifferent to the fate of both.

Where was Yellow Jack? Where was Beatrice? These were the questions he sought, and was determined to find, an answer to.

"Where is your leader?" he demanded of the first outlaw he chanced upon.

"None of your infernal business!" was the surly response.

Tiger Dick was in the mood for no palaver.

"A-lariat here!" he cried. "A dozen of them, if you have them."

They were supplied readily enough.

"That's it!" he cried, pleased at the promptness of the response. "String up every mother's son of these hounds!"

His men sprung to the work with alacrity. They enjoyed the fun of hanging when it could be done with impunity.

"Come!" cried the Tiger, briskly. "Some of you speak while you have time! The man that's pulled up in this hanging-bee never comes down until he's cold!"

"Hold on, Cap!" said one, hurriedly. "I ain't a hog, fur one."

"Speak quick, then!"

With a wave of his hand the Tiger suspended the preparations for hanging.

"You're after Yaller Jack?" muttered the recusant.

"Yes. Where is he?"

"Up the pass, some'rs, I reckon. He sot out with us."

"Had he a lady with him?"

"He hadn't nothin' else, boss."

"One whom he abducted from Santa Fe a week ago?"

"That's the critter."

"But what makes you think that he is *up* the pass? How do you know that he hasn't gone on ahead?"

"I seen him pull out among the rocks, Cap, when the other gang dropped onto us."

"Remember, my man, I'll swing you so high that you'll never set foot on this earth again, if you are lying to me."

"All right, Cap. That's your privilege. But I'm tellin' ye what I seen. That's all I kin do."

"Did any one else see this?" asked the Tiger, sweeping the circle of prisoners with his searching eye.

"I seen it, boss," said another.

"Men," said the Tiger to his own follow-

ers, "divide into two parties—quickly! Don't stand on ceremony! Here! Moran, take that squad down the pass, and don't leave a covert unbeaten! The rest of you follow me!"

Rapidly, on foot, he led them back over the path of the recent battle, instructing them as to how they were to conduct the search.

"Hark!" he cried, suddenly. "That was a pistol-shot far up the canyon."

No other sound broke the silence. The distance was too great for a human voice to reach them.

"Forward!" commanded the Tiger, trembling with eager suspense. "That shot indicates the presence of men at war. But, caution! There may be others here besides him."

A moment later came a rapid succession of shots.

"Some one has been started from cover!" cried the Tiger, increasing his exertions, so that he outstripped his most active subordinate. "That is a chase!"

Soon all was still again; but he kept on, only careful to observe caution and watchfulness.

Presently he heard the thud of a horse's hoofs, and on ahead caught sight of the head and shoulders of a rider.

"Yellow Jack!" he ejaculated—"and alone! What has he done with her? My God! it cannot be that she has sought to escape from him, and that he has shot her!"

He redoubled his efforts, increasing the distance between him and the men who were toiling after him.

A moment later a clear, ringing voice, which brought his heart into his throat, came down the canyon like a note of music.

"Kill me! but you shall not harm him!"

"Come with me quietly and at once, or I swear that I will riddle him with bullets!" snarled Yellow Jack. "Do you think that I will be detained here until that fellow has brought back a lot of his comrades?"

His voice reached Tiger Dick like an unintelligible, rumbling growl.

"I will go with you," sobbed Beatrice, realizing the hopelessness of opposition, "if you will promise to send some one to his relief."

"I will do that. Haven't I let him off once? I bear him no grudge."

"Dear uncle Joe!" murmured Beatrice, bending over him, "you know that I would not leave you if it were possible to do otherwise."

"Don't worry about me, my dear. I shall get on. And this is not my last bout with yonder ruffian, if I live through it!"

"Oh! do not imperil yourself again on my account!"

"Hah! what is this?" cried Yellow Jack, starting at a sudden sound.

"Your death, you devil!" came the stern response.

And Tiger Dick sprung into view.

With a scream of delight Beatrice leaped to her feet.

"Ben!—dear Ben!" she cried, about to fly to him.

She had been conning that name over for weeks, until now it sprung instinctively to her lips.

It made the heart of Tiger Dick, or Black-Hoss Ben, as she knew him most familiarly, leap into his mouth.

But fortune brought it about that Beatrice should spring up directly between him and his foe, so that he had to drop the muzzle of his revolver, which an instant later would have winged a bullet straight to the heart of the infamous *mestizo*.

Yellow Jack was quick to seize the advantage thus offered.

"Accept my compliments!" he cried leveling a deadly aim over the girl's shoulder.

Beatrice saw her lover's peril. The agony of that moment endowed her with super-human strength and activity. With a piercing shriek she sprung upon the *mestizo*, seizing his arm and dragging it down, just as his weapon exploded.

With a gasping cry she fell away from him, staggered a step backward, and sunk to the ground.

Joel Brinton saw this with a groan of horror, and struggled feebly, but ineffectually, to rise.

That gasping cry went through Tiger

Dick's heart like a sword-thrust. Had he found her but to lose her? Would that one heart-cry—"Ben! dear Ben!"—be the only perfect memory left him of one who had crossed his life-path to work such a revolution in it all?

For the next moment he was raving mad. With a cry like that of a wild beast he sprung upon the *mestizo*.

Involuntarily he dropped his revolver. That would not satisfy him. No! he must crush the life out of the viper with his bare hands!

His onset was irresistible, and so like the falling of a thunderbolt that Yellow Jack had not time for another shot.

Clutching him by the throat, he bore him to the ground in one lightning swoop. The head of the *mestizo* crashed against the rocky ground with such force as to stun him into instant unconsciousness.

With set teeth and blazing eyes Tiger Dick clung to his throat, strangling the life out of him.

But presently a delicate hand was laid on his arm.

"Ben! dear Ben! you mustn't! Oh! desist!"

It was Beatrice, who had crept over to him to save him from the murder of even their deadliest foe.

Instantly he obeyed her. It was blood that had stood between them; he could not add more to the terrible stain!

"My darling!" he cried, catching her to his breast, yet retaining his knee on Yellow Jack's breast. "Oh, my dearest! you are not hurt?"

"My love!" she whispered, twining her arms about his neck.

And her head sunk like a drooping flower on his shoulder.

Her eyes read his fondly. Her bloodless lips wooed his caress.

With tremulous eagerness, yet reverently, almost with fear, he lightly pressed the seal of their betrothal there.

She smiled seraphically, and whispered:

"My lover!—my husband!"

At this moment the men burst upon the scene.

Tiger Dick rose with Beatrice in his arms, not enduring that even her dress should be in contact with the loathed body of the infamous *mestizo*.

He sat down on a fallen tree-trunk with her in his lap.

He brushed her hair back from her forehead, and kissed her white brow, her eyes, her cheeks, her lips, murmuring words of pity and endearment.

"Again!" she breathed, so faintly that the sound scarcely reached his ear.

And gazing with her soul in her eyes into his, she feebly pursed her pale lips for his caress.

He complied, with tears of melancholy ecstasy in his eyes.

She smiled and closed her eyes; a white circle formed about her mouth, and she seemed to sink to sleep in his arms like a weary child.

But now a wild agony of rage and terror seized him.

"She is not dead! She cannot be dead!" he cried, fairly beside himself. "Beatrice, my darling, speak to me! Oh! if you love me, only open your dear eyes once more! My love! my love!"

Then turning upon the men in a white heat of rage:

"Why do you stand staring there? Away, every one of you! Water! water! fetch me water!"

They sprung away, and he was left alone with her.

Joel Brinton lay in a swoon, shocked out of consciousness.

Yellow Jack gave no promise of recovering for some time to come from the concussion of the brain that had suspended his villainous activity.

Then the despairing lover laid his fair burden on the ground, and with tremulous, reverential touch stripped the torn and powder-blackened clothing from her virgin bosom.

She had drawn the weapon almost directly over her heart. Her side was fearfully lacerated and scorched. But the bullet wound was below the region of the heart.

If it had missed the vital organ, and only penetrated the lower lobe of the lung, she might yet live.

The principal danger would then be from internal hemorrhage, caused by the unavoidable racking in moving her such a distance to a place where she could be cared for. But, oh! if she lived he would see that she was moved carefully!

He stanch'd the wound with his handkerchief, while his hot tears fell upon it.

On the return of the men, he hid her from their profane eyes with her shawl, while he received from them the water which they brought in their hats.

Then he sent them away, and returned to his tender task.

Upon washing away the blood, he uttered a sharp, eager cry. He found that the *mestizo*'s bullet had only scored its passage along her side on the surface, the ghastliness of the wound being caused by the explosion of his pistol in the folds of her dress.

She would live! she would live! He did not question it now. His love would hold her back from the dark gateway of death.

The wound was scarcely dressed when he was delighted to see the color coming back to her lips; and presently he gazed once more into the fathomless depths of her eyes, and drank in the faint music of her voice.

Her first thought, after a glad greeting and the interchange of low-breathed vows of life-long constancy, was of the old friend who had risked so much for her.

Tiger Dick gladly gave him his care. And Joel Brinton's first surmise proved correct. He had a broken shoulder-blade, but was otherwise as good as new.

Beatrice's smile and the faint pressure of her hand put him in so cheerful a frame of mind that he said:

"Well! well! we're all quite comfortable after all, aren't we? I want but one thing to make me positively happy!"

"You shall have it, if it can be got!" was Tiger Dick's assurance.

"My dear sir," said Joel Brinton, with some show of embarrassment, "if I could ask a favor of one whom I have used so shabbily, it would be that you make some effort to recover my wig. One of the vagabonds in that villain's employ must have it in his possession. I don't like the notion of getting up an armed force to invade the Indian country for such an object; but if it could be recovered by any means short of that, it would indeed be a matter of no trifling moment to me."

Tiger Dick laughed.

"I think we can manage it without a slaughter of Lo, the poor Indian!" he said. "It is probable that one of the white rascals we have trussed up a little further down the pass is the offender."

This proved to be the case; and the wig was restored to its rightful owner in almost as good condition as when he was unlawfully deprived of it.

After that he was afflicted with no more "cold did diz ze'd!"

The Tiger saw that Jim Farnsworth had as careful nursing as any one.

"No malice, Jim!" he said, pressing the detective's hand. "I admit that you have the shabbiest of luck; but we can't all come out on top, you know!"

"It's all right, Dick," replied Farnsworth. "I ain't done with you yet. But we'll fight it out on the square, and neither hit the other when he's down."

Tiger Dick this time failed to smile with his wonted reckless good-nature. He was thinking of Beatrice. Without reply he went out from the detective's presence, walking with his eyes on the ground, grave and thoughtful.

Meanwhile Joe Moran had suddenly disappeared. It dawned upon his men that he had given them the slip; and they swore eternal vengeance, and set out in search of him.

Tiger Dick did not forget his bargain with him. He had carried out his part of the contract; and Beatrice was saved. He might at any time demand that the Tiger redeem his pledge, and aid him to rob the dead Bob Cady and his living and distracted sweetheart.

But Beatrice's love had uplifted and sanctified him. How could he, who was now a part of her, sully himself with so infamous a wrong? Was fate to be ever against him? Could he never escape from the clinging ceremonial of his life of crime?

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CRYPTOGRAM REGAINED.

The scene reopens in a shanty the order and cleanliness of which is indication of a woman's supervision.

A fortnight has elapsed since the stirring events just narrated.

At a rude table sits a man in the pretentious dress of a Western sport.

At his elbow is a glass of whisky, flanked by a flat black bottle; and between the first and second finger he holds a cigar, the ash of which has fallen on the lapel of his velvet coat.

His hat rests on the back of his head, and a stray lock of hair falls negligently over his forehead.

From the uncertainty of his movements, his bleared eyes and thick speech, it is evident that he is under the influence of liquor.

Beside him stands a woman of rare beauty, with jet-black hair and eyes. The latter are restless and burn with a light which indicates some mental disturbance not far from insanity.

"I say, Bess! ye ain't treatin' me right—no ye ain't!" hiccupped the man.

"I've treated you altogether too well; that's my only fault," said the woman. "If I had made you keep your distance, as I ought to have done, you wouldn't be lounging here drunk."

"Made me keep my distance! Waal, I sw'ar! I'd like to know what would jest satisfy you in that line. I never see your match for a stand-off. The minute I come the honeyfugle, you set down on me, an' won't have none of it nohow. An' hyar I've offered fair an' square matrimony. What more do ye want than that?"

"A pretty man you are for matrimony! You'll scratch a poor-man's back all your life, if you live to be a hundred! But excuse me, if you please!"

"Then you're too fine to marry a poor man?"

"If I ain't worth my keep, I ain't worth anything."

"That's so, my girl, an' mighty choice keep, too. I've got eyes in my head, an' I know a fine woman when I see her. But haven't I agreed to keep you in better style than you ever see in this hyar country?"

"Promises! Wind!"

"But I was givin' it to ye straight. I tell ye, when I grab my pile we'll go to Europe, an' hobnob with lords and ladies."

"Ha! ha! ha! I hear ducks!"

"Oh! I sw'ar it's as square as a die! Maybe you don't believe me."

"Get your pile first, and then we'll talk the matter over."

"But I've got my pile!"

"In your pocket? Take another drink, and you'll own a bonanza!"

"There was an eager light in the woman's eyes which a sober man might have noticed. She refilled the glass and even raised it to the inebriate's lips.

"Don't put it so close under me nose; if it happened to slop over, it would run down my gullet. Thar, what did I tell ye?"

And he laughed as he tossed it off.

Then looking into the woman's face with a cunning, mysterious twinkle in his eyes, he said:

"Ye wa'n't so fur off when ye said I had it in my pocket. I say, Bess! would you marry me out o' hand ef I could show up the best mine in this hyar section?"

"Give us something sensible!" replied the woman, contemptuously.

"Oh! I'm talkin' business now."

"It sounds like it!"

"That's neither hyar no thar! I tell ye I've got the rocks!"

"I see 'em—in your eye!"

"Would you like to see 'em in *your* eye?"

"When you come to me with half enough to go to Europe on, I'll begin to get my outfit ready."

"Honor bright?" cried the man, eagerly.

"Try me."

"I will, by Jingol!"

The man sprung up and began to fumble about his jacket.

"I say, Bess! trot out yer scissors."

Now the woman's eyes glittered almost savagely.

"Take another drink first," she urged, extending it with a tremulous hand.

The man looked at her and laughed.

"You're a queer one," he said. "I thought you didn't want me to drink. But I never turn up my nose at an oily straight, you bet!"

And he drank what was proffered.

"Whar's yer scissors?" he asked again.

"You don't want any scissors. What's the matter with you? Sit down and keep quiet."

But opposition only served to bring out his drunken obstinacy, as she doubtless intended.

"Waal, I do want scissors!" he insisted. "You stumped me to show my pile; an' now you're bound to see it, an' stand by your word too."

"What's the matter with you? Are you going to cut that thing so as to give me the trouble of mending it?"

"I reckon you won't grudge the stitches. Look a' this hyar. What have ye got to say to that—hey?"

And having ripped the lining of his coat, he drew forth several scraps of paper.

The woman's eyes blazed, and her fingers twitched as if she longed to spring forward and snatch the fragments out of his hand. But with a desperate struggle she mastered the impulse, and with assumed indifference said:

"Well! you must have gone clean daft! What are you carrying that truck about with you for?"

"Truck!" chuckled the man. "Waal, that thar's a kind o' truck that they don't carry around every day in these hyar parts!"

"I should say so!" sneered the woman; "though they say all the fools ain't dead yet. I thought you had some money in there. Give me your coat so that I can sew that rent up."

"Waal, I sw'ar!" laughed the man. "It takes a long while to git anything through you, fur a fact!"

"Thank you! We won't be married *this* week, if you please!"

"Look a-hyar, Bess! you know I wasn't earnest in that. But what do you suppose I would be carryin' around bits of brown paper, fur ef they wasn't worth somethin'?"

"What's that worth?" asked the woman, glancing at it indifferently. "Why, that isn't sensible. Nobody could read that."

"No more they could, ef they didn't know how. But it's mighty choice readin', fur all that."

His persistence seemed to arrest the woman's attention.

"What is it all about, I'd like to know?" she said, coming closer and bending over it for a nearer examination. "I don't see anything but a lot of queer scratches."

As she intimated, it was a number of torn bits of coarse brown paper, covered with odd-looking symbols.

The man was busying himself matching the scraps, as if arranging a puzzle.

"You ain't very handy at that," said the woman, taking the pieces out of his hands. "Let me try."

The fact was that the impatience that was consuming her would not wait upon his fumbling.

Her hands trembled perceptibly as she adjusted the parts.

"That looks like a map," she observed, as the work grew under her hands.

"That's jest what it is," answered the man.

"Is this here the writing about it?"

"You bet! And it's the sweetest writin' you ever read!"

"But no one could make head or tail to this. It ain't writing at all."

"Not the kind you're used to, my dear. You'll have to go to school ag'in to read that thar. Have you got it all straight?"

"I reckon so. Look at it yourself."

He did so, unsteadily.

"That's all right," he said. "Now, hyar's the key. See what you kin make out of it."

He gave her other bits of coarse paper, such as is used to wrap hardware in.

When these were arranged, they disclosed a key to the cipher.

Now the woman ceased to restrain the manifestation of her eagerness. She pored over the cryptogram as if she would devour it, while the man lay back in his chair, chuckling at her excitement.

"I reckon that'll marry us," he said.

"Davel!" cried the woman, in hoarse, low

tones, not lifting her eyes from her work, "this is a fortune—an exhaustless fortune! If it's half true, it will make a bonanza king of you! How did you come by it?"

"Oh! I fell heir to it in the reg'lar way," he said, off-hand.

"But is this all of it—every bit?"

"You bet it is! Do you think a man loses any o' that kind o' rubbish?"

"But what are these dark stains on the paper? They look like—like—"

She stopped with a shudder.

"Them's blackberry stains," said the man, indifferently. "Hand the thing over, ef you're satisfied, tell I put 'er back in my coat."

"But you are sure that it's all here?" urged the woman, in a low, constrained voice. "It's too precious to lose a bit of it."

"Didnt I tell you it was all there? I seen the thing made—that is, the key—an' I know jest what there was of it."

"Then I'm satisfied—perfectly satisfied!"

As she hung over the cryptogram, the woman's long hair had fallen so as to hide her cheek. Now, as she rose, she threw it back, and disclosed a face as terrible as that of the fabled Medusa.

Her eyes blazed from the midst of dark circles. A white ring had formed about her bloodless lips. Beads of anguish-wrung sweat stood on her forehead.

"Good God! what's the matter with you?" cried the man, starting forward in his chair, yet too much under the influence of the liquor he had drank to be thoroughly himself all at once.

On the table lay his belt, with his revolvers and bowie. He had taken it off to relieve himself of their weight, here in what he thought to be a place of perfect security.

The woman drew one of the revolvers from its holster, and brushed the belt with the remaining weapons off the table, so that they fell on the floor behind her.

Then cocking the pistol she held, she leveled it at the breast of the amazed inebriate; and clutching at her own breast with her left hand, as if to tear out her burning heart, she said, hoarsely:

"I am about to wash out those berry stains, as you call them, in your blood!"

"My God!" gasped the man, now thoroughly sobered. "You are beside yourself!"

"I have been beside myself ever since I saw the spectacle you prepared for me!"

"I? What spectacle?"

"The dead body of my lover, Robert Cady!"

"My God!"

Joe Moran stared in horrified despair. He felt that his time was come. He had eluded the men who had helped him to get the cryptogram, and while waiting in cover until the first keenness of their search for him was over, he had come under the spell of this woman!

He knew nothing about her—whence she came, or why she lived in seclusion in this out-of-the-way mining camp. But she was different from any woman he had ever known before. She was a lady in all her behavior, and while listening with apparent favor to his protestations of love, had compelled his respect.

Now he realized that it had been all a trap from the first. She had wheedled him into betraying his secret, and putting the cryptogram into her hand, and now she was ready to take vengeance on his ruthless murder of her lover.

"I spent two days and nights counting his wounds!" she said, in a slow, mechanical voice. "For every ghastly rent I mean to score your body with ten! If there is room in your guilty soul, for repentance make it quickly. You have not a minute longer to live!"

"My God!" gasped the guilty wretch again.

He did not think of appealing to her mercy. It did not occur to him that he might possibly outwit her, and escape. He sat and stared at her while she waited.

"Prepare!" she said presently, in a hoarse monotone.

And by the glare of her eyes it was plain that her mind was overthrown.

Slowly she raised the weapon again.

But now came an interruption. The door

of the shanty was thrown open, and a man appeared on the threshold.

The woman looked round and saw Six-foot Si.

"For God's sake!" he cried, don't shoot!"

Beth's hand fell to her side. She seemed to forget her intended victim, as she gazed earnestly, anxiously at Si.

Then came the reaction in Joe Moran's breast. He had been prostrated by despair, feeling that the hand of fate had risen against him, and that no human effort could stay it. But now he saw his chance, and with a yell of murderous hate he bounded from his chair and wrenched the weapon from the girl's unresisting hand.

He would have turned it against her breast and sent her to join her dead lover, but Six-foot Si swooped down upon him, and with one stunning blow stretched him senseless on the floor.

Convinced of her inflexible determination to avenge Bob Cady's wrongs, Six-foot Si resolved to take the blood of the murderer on his own hands rather than leave her to cloud her life with it.

"It's rough enough fur a man," he argued, "but when it comes to a woman, it's goin' clean ag'in nater."

But she was the first to come upon Moran, and when Si found them, it already appeared that she was encouraging Moran's addresses.

This not only wounded Si's love, but it shocked him. How could she bring herself to anything so horrible as marriage with the murderer of her lover?

Si fairly dogged the two, but with the cunning of a savage. So it came about that, listening at a cranny in the wall of the shanty, he learned her true motives just in time to save her from the calamity which he sought to avert.

Unwinding from his waist a piece of rope which he had provided for this very use, he bound Moran securely. Then he turned to Beth, his strong feeling giving him a boldness he would not otherwise have manifested.

She had sat down, resting her head wearily on her hand. He saw that the unbalancing of her mind through suffering made her unaccountable for what she had been on the point of doing, and it was a satisfaction to feel that such violence was foreign to her womanly nature.

"Come!" he said. "Let me take this matter out of your hands. I know all about this hyar. Will you trust it with me?"

"Yes," she said, looking at him confidently.

"And you'll go home to the Bend with me? Thar's Mrs. Dangerfield as'll be a heap glad to see ye."

"Yes," she said again, "I will go with you."

And she put her hand in his, and gazed with a sort of yearning anxiety into his face.

Si blushed and trembled and dropped his eyes.

"Hem!" he coughed. "I'll look after this chap, ef so be you're content to turn him over to me. He'll get his due—never fear o' that!"

Beth looked at Moran, and with a shudder drew closer to Si.

Gathering up the fragments of the cryptogram, he wrapped them up carefully, and put them in his pocket. He then looked once more to assure himself that Moran was securely bound, and thereupon led Beth out of the shanty.

"It's only a step to whar we'll git hosses," he said; "and then we won't let no grass grow under our feet between hyar an' Mulligan's Bend."

Together they walked rapidly toward the center of the mining-camp on the outskirts of which stood the shanty they left behind.

They had been gone scarcely five minutes, when shadowy figures appeared in its vicinity, moving stealthily about.

"This hyar's the place, gents," said a low voice. "He's sparkin' his woman."

"We'll soon knock his sparkin' fur him!" muttered another voice.

Several crept up to the door, and on a sudden, burst it in and leaped across the threshold, with weapons held in readiness for instant use.

They found only a helpless man, bound and just beginning to show signs of returning consciousness.

The intruders were the men he had betrayed. They had "come for him!"

Their first demand was the cryptogram. He knew that he was as good as a dead man, and that betraying the whereabouts of the precious cipher would not secure his reprieve, so he resolved that they should not profit by anything they could force from him.

In baffled rage they hanged him before the shanty and riddled his body with bullets.

The noise roused the whole camp, and the miners flocked to the scene.

Returning with a horse on which he intended to convey Moran to Mulligan's Bend, there to be tried for his crimes by due process of Vigilante law, Six-foot Si, without regret, saw the matter thus taken out of his hands.

But he knew enough of mining-camps in general, and of this one in particular, to believe that, if the true situation transpired, the disappointed outlaws might draw enough of the camp to their side to make it anything but safe for himself and Beth; so, hurrying back to her, he got her in the saddle; and together they "made a blue streak" for Mulligan's Bend, where they arrived safely.

By that time Beth showed marked signs of delirium; and she was soon tossing in brain fever. Cheerfully seconded by Mrs. Dangerfield, Six foot Si nursed her back to health; and in her convalescence she manifested a child-like reliance upon him in all things.

A year later he was the happiest man that "stood in shoe-leather." We leave the discerning reader to guess the cause of his felicity.

The Golden Serpent reached Mulligan's Bend to find that the Tiger had already been released by Joe Moran; and while hastening back to Coyote to relieve the unhappy Giacomo, she met him. She had the sense to see that his act while personating her so successfully would make that section too hot to hold her, and so concluded to fly with him. That's how she "saved her bacon!"

Tiger Dick sat beside Jim Farnsworth's bedside. No one thought of interfering with him while the detective was "on the shelf." He had just told his relations with Beatrice.

"Now, I have a bargain to propose to you," he said, in conclusion. "I can't tie her to me with this thing hanging over me—that's flat! She shall not run the risk of some day seeing her husband swinging from a gallows! She may recover entirely from this; but then"—he paused with a sense of constriction in his throat and the pressure of tears back of his eyes—"she may linger only for a few weeks or months. I want to take her into Lower California, to a perfect paradise of a place that I know of, where everything will be in her favor. But she must be entirely free from anxiety. What I wish to propose, then, is that you give me a reprieve of six months. If during that time she recovers or shows a prospect of eventual recovery, I will present myself in Frisco for trial. In any event, at the expiration of that time, if she be not at the point of death, I will give myself up. Finally, at her death, be it sooner or later, I will place myself in your hands."

Jim Farnsworth frankly and unhesitatingly extended his hand.

"I'll agree to that, Dick," he said.

At Beatrice's instance, Tiger Dick readily consented to forego his revenge against Yellow Jack, and leave him to the law. He was done with violence. Her gentle hand must lead him through paths of peace.

THE END.

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